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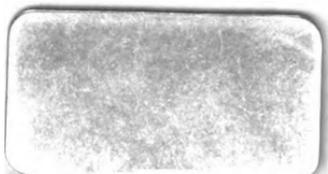
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The hidden sanctuary

Jesse Brett

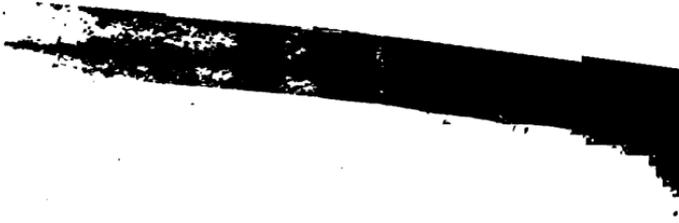
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DEVOTIONAL STUDIES

JESSE BRETT



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DEVOTIONAL STUDIES

BY

REV. JESSE H. H. LEE

AUTHOR OF

"THE ADAM AND THE EVE," "THE SONG OF THE WISDOM,"
"THE CROSS," "SAINTE"

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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PREFACE

To live a spiritual life is to live with a definite and sustained outlook towards God. It is a progressive life. It is life in which many things are brought together and employed by the soul in the way of its perfection. It is life within which the soul ever perceives the Divine look towards itself, and seeks by its own self-expression to respond in some manner not all unworthy of the love assured by the Divine regard. There are great responsibilities and clearly defined obligations; but there are also divinely given directions and gifts of grace. There are manifold trials and recurring difficulties; but also there are amazing encouragements and illuminating experiences. There are, in short, experiences as it were of two worlds, of two orders—the natural and the supernatural. But as progress is made, it is the supernatural which attains importance. We observe this in individual cases. The histories of saintly lives are uniformly records of the supernatural, the truth of which is confirmed by the facts of our own experience of Divine grace.

In the following pages an effort has been made to trace the progress of the soul in grace and love. If the supernatural character of developing spiritual life is consistently emphasized throughout, it is because

of all that is taught in the writings of the Saints, and still more because of what is seen in their lives. It is surely to this very end that the great examples of the Saints have been retained in the deep consciousness of the Church. They are witnesses whose evidence is the constant encouragement of the faithful. They prove the truth of that vast reserve of spiritual teaching which is never exhausted by all that is spoken and written from age to age for the guidance of souls.

This little book is the result of but one humble effort to gather from out of the Church's treasury some of the truths of the spiritual life, and to pass them on, in the hope of helping others. The times favour every work which has for its object the training of souls in the Faith. The writer hopes he has written nothing contrary to the truth or the practice of the Faith. He asks the prayers of his readers, and especially that they will sometimes remember him at the Altar.

The frontispiece is a traditional portrait of S. Catherine of Siena, through whom so many have been instructed in the way of perfection.

J. B.



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THE HIDDEN SANCTUARY

PART I

THE APPROACH

WHEN we study carefully the life and character of a Saint, we are arrested by what we describe as his detachment of spirit. But that does not convey the whole truth of that which we perceive or feel. The Saint is not merely detached, held aloof from us by preoccupation with interests which lie outside our own. Towards others he is always sympathetic, self-forgetting, and utterly charitable. Human interests are not beneath his regard; rather he brings to them a touch of spiritual refinement: in a measure he glorifies them. That which he imparts to them flows from the hidden spring of his own life. His happiness in anything is in proportion to the spiritual freedom it secures to him. His joy is interior and spiritual, and is not dependent upon exterior things. He is indeed a spiritually detached person; but in truth he is so because he lives in a state that is itself hidden. His spirit is always there. What we observe, admire, and love in him is the outward effect of the inward reality of his life. He lives with God, within the hidden court or sanctuary where He is All in all.

B

What that state, or court, or sanctuary may be is ours to inquire; for it concerns us all very intimately. We are very near to it, if not within it. To be near is not enough, though so many appear to be content to go no further. But if the love of God be in our hearts it bears witness within us to a state of spiritual life the reality of which is familiar to the Saints, however unperceived by many. They live within it as in a well-loved and wholly proved house of security. To themselves they seem to live only when they can withdraw from worldly interests and be wholly content with the higher concerns of this spiritual state. In the world they are restless; for they know themselves as but "*strangers and pilgrims*" in the confusion of its ways and by-ways.

Sometimes this state is described in terms of space: "*Thou art my hiding-place;*"¹ or, otherwise, as the realization of a protecting presence; of safety as within a place of sanctuary: "*Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*"² And again: "*For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me.*"³ Thus Christ is thought of as the Sanctuary of the soul; and that is a conception of Him that is never obscured. It is of our Lord in glory that S. John declares when describing the Holy City: "*And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*"⁴ He shares in His sacred humanity the very Divine prerogative of His Godhead. Our

¹ Ps. xxxii. 7. ² Ps. xxxi. 20. ³ Ps. xxvii. 5. ⁴ Rev. xxi. 22.

security within that hidden sanctuary is assured if we are in Christ. Where He is there is the temple or sanctuary. In Him we are already within it.

It will be well to disclaim at once any idea of narrowness when we speak of temple or sanctuary. The vastness, expansiveness and freedom of the spiritual life forbid it. Ideas of depth and height are familiar enough, and they need only to be rightly understood, and then they are found to be not inconsistent with that which we shall retain throughout this book. We recognize in certain souls powers which enable them to rise to great heights in contemplation of Divine things; we even hear the call of the Beloved to the Bride to ascend with Him from height to height, as if bursting all narrowing bounds. But exaltation is not, in spiritual things, measurable height; it is rather increased capacity and developed power. The soul in whom are manifested the early movements of the Divine love is within the sanctuary; so also is that one to whom the Beloved says: "*Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Sheina and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.*"¹

But there is a more exact way of defining the hidden sanctuary. "*Abide in Me and I in you.*"² When this mutual indwelling is a realized fact, it is to the soul as a state of enclosure well defined; with regard to the spiritual and heavenly world, it is all-embracing; with regard to matters and things which do not assist the soul in the way of perfection,

¹ Cant. iv. 8.

² S. John xv. 4.

it is all-excluding. The frontier line of this state is readily perceived by the loving soul, although it may appear to be but faintly drawn. Love is our sure guide in this state; for it regards only the desire of the Beloved: "*In what place my Lord the King shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will Thy servant be.*"¹

But catholic devotion has led to a definition of this state which is an actual expression of this mutual direction of love. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is to the catholic the mystical temple of Divine love, the hidden sanctuary in which he abides. Realizing our Lord's words, "*abide in Me,*" we are aware of the shelter of His Sacred Heart; while His concluding words, "*and I in you,*" constitute our hearts His dwelling-place. In the union of hearts, that is, of love, we attain to the true conception of the hidden sanctuary. No teaching concerning the Sacred Heart of Jesus can be complete without this solid basis of unifying love. Its value to us consists in its strength, and in its effect upon our wills in the way of perfection. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is weakened if it declines towards sentimentalism; it is a source of strength when, by means of it, our love is directed in clear purposefulness towards the accomplishment of the will of the Beloved. In the simplicity of union there will be pure devotion and an interior light, which is none other than that of Divine truth, wherein we may discern the intimate movements of love. Worship within the sanctuary will be ordered in obedience to Divine inspiration, and be made

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 21.

acceptable through the merits of the Sacred Heart. We are "*accepted in the Beloved.*"¹

But before we can properly consider the occupation of the soul within the sanctuary, it will be necessary to give attention to certain spiritual duties and obligations which constitute the immediate preparation of the soul. The life of love is truly a hidden life. The mystic life develops hiddenly, not independently, as though outward practices of religion were unimportant; but as resulting from the quickened love which is the fruit of grace rightly sought and fruitfully used. And in catholic order alone do we find the help we need. Other systems have been devised; but there are few ways more dangerous than that of spurious mysticism—a danger unsuspected by non-catholic enthusiasts. Devotion itself requires to be rightly directed; and even the religious temperament must be under control, if the highest results are to be attained in a life of proved virtue. "*Be not high-minded, but fear,*" is the apostolic and catholic precept.

I

If we would really enter the hidden sanctuary, and know that degree of pure spiritual living which distinguishes the Saint, we must be divested of all such worldly and temporal things as may hinder our freedom in spiritual action. If we are intent on this purpose of interior life, we should deliberately detach ourselves in will from all exterior concerns. That is, we should never seek them as ends in themselves; not

¹ Eph. i. 6.

cling to them with affection. They cannot satisfy the spirit. They can afford no more than passing sensible pleasure. We could not remain content with them. Only our Lord Beloved can content us, fill us, exalt us, hold us. It is a truth we cannot escape, try to evade it as we may. It is self-proclaimed throughout the entire inner consciousness, wherein the oft-repeated words of the Saint are justified by experience: "Thou, O God, hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts find no rest until they rest in Thee." And so we learn to renounce all that is merely earthly, and also to leave, little by little, everything for Him, even passing by His gifts and consolations in the sole desire for Himself alone.

Let us give the utmost care to this all-important consideration. What is our desire? What is our purpose? Whom do we seek when we turn our attention to the mystic life of the hidden sanctuary? There, if we are permitted to enter, we shall find no place for "self." In this Divine presence our self-loving aims, our spiritual ambitions, are tested by the high standard of the Spirit of God. Are we prepared for that? Let us approach our Lord with great simplicity of purpose. We seek Him, desire Him, alone. Let us give ourselves to Him, that, according to His knowledge of us and His own desire of love towards us, He may take us into the love and peace of His Sacred Heart, and instruct us in the high demands and supreme obligations of love. It is all-important that we be not absorbed in any preconceived ideas of our own needs, nor in desires for particular experiences, as though we could know

of ourselves what is fittest. "*Shew me Thy way, O Lord.*" There is no other way to the highest, even though it lead through much that to the neophyte appears unnecessary, because progress seems thereby delayed. Let us advance with humility and unquestioning faith in the Beloved Who calls us. He never delays a step for which the soul is really prepared, nor withholds a gift when He sees we are ready to receive it. It is not when we think ourselves to be ready that we shall be recipients of graces, but when He perceives in us the fitness of which He alone can judge. And His greatest favours are bestowed when we feel ourselves most unworthy of them.

In some cases precious years are wasted because this supreme requirement has not been complied with. The failure is in part due to self-confidence and over-eagerness in the individual; and in part to lack of instruction and wise direction. It is so easy to fall into error, even when sincerely desiring to do right. There is much that pleases a beginner in the spiritual life. The higher spiritual ways are attractive; spiritual discourse is charming; and the sympathy of devout persons delightful to inexperienced souls. They love to talk of their state. Because they are so sensibly gratified they imagine themselves advanced in the way of perfection. They may be even so sure of this that they will criticize their teachers; and when convinced of their own imperfection betray their weakness in futile anger with themselves. Yet how very far they are from understanding the nature of spiritual perfection. The very conditions are wanting. No spiritual life can

be built up upon a worldly basis, nor on self-pleasing devotion. Spiritual things must be sought in spiritual ways. The natural way must be left for the supernatural. The self must be detached from its own fancies, and surrendered in simple obedience to love. This is no sentiment, but a plain truth which experience will confirm. The dangers in the way of beginners are so many and so subtle that a whole treatise might be written about them.¹ But dangers imply that there is that which needs protection. In this case it is the soul which needs to be protected in its love, trained in strength through humility and simplicity, encouraged to love by being shown its power, taught the duties of love, both towards itself and towards the Beloved. But if this is to a great extent the work of her spiritual guides, there is also an equally necessary duty of the soul towards herself. Self-training is the application of spiritual instruction; and without it there can be no stability of interior life.

II

The preparation of the soul for the service of the hidden sanctuary may be regarded by the beginner as of less importance than the experience to which he hastens. He is eager and impatient of restraint; but let him rather attend humbly to the teaching of the Saints. That desired sanctuary is so holy, so still in the depth of its peace, that no voice or sound

¹ They have been described in *S. John of the Cross*, "Dark Night," Book I. The reader is referred to that work.

that breathes of sin can be heard there. The soul that would enter must be silent within itself. The dictum of the Saints is: "Make a great silence within thy soul and God will speak with thee." What they mean is not the few moments of recollection we may at certain times experience, or even try to make for ourselves; but rather the habitual silence which is the fruit of much self-discipline. Let the beginner try to be interiorly silent, that is, let him seek to separate himself from the persistent thoughts by which he is ever reminded, even in prayer, of the world and its cares, ambitions and delights; of affections and desires; of animosities, jealousies, and resentments, which are rooted in pride; or let him try to subdue the evil thoughts and imaginations from which few souls are wholly free, and he will feel at once the difficulty of attaining even to a few hours of holy silence of soul. How much more difficult is the acquisition of habitual interior silence.

But it is possible, and perhaps easier than we think. It is not the state desired by the Quietist. It is the state from which has been banished every thought and imagination that could hinder the reception of Divine inspiration; but it is also the state of perfect interior attention to God in love. It is thus a state of active love; but by reason of its pureness it is also a state of receptive love. The occasional experience of the blessedness of this state granted to beginners in proof of the Divine love towards them, should encourage them to loving efforts to dispose themselves more constantly for the recep-

tion of this grace. Let them not be for a moment discouraged by anything of the contrary nature which they may discover in themselves; but calmly and with strong, loving purpose let them essay the work of interior preparation. The simplest action will be found to be also the most effectual. The Holy Spirit will work at all times with the soul that is true. It is intention that matters. We may be discouraged, we may fall through weakness or through inveterate habit; but if the intention be directed towards the perfect good, and renewed with every day's devotion, there is at least the will to perfection—an attitude worthy in itself. If the intention be fixed it is easily reasserted when the weakness is made evident through a momentary lapse into faultiness. Hurtful trains of thought or useless imaginings may be overcome by constantly directing the intention to the ideal in view, and by loving confidence in God, Who ever regards the goodwill of His children, and rewards it with grace. There is no perfection where there has been no struggle; and so great a grace as interior silence cannot be acquired without effort. The opposition of the enemy is always in proportion to the victory we seek. We may even estimate the good we desire by regarding the nature of the enemy's attack. That he should with so much malice oppose our desire for interior silence is one clear indication of its importance in the spiritual life. Let us mark his action and be wise.

Interior silence prepares the soul for its rightful occupation with God. We exclude the evil that we may admit the good. In the silence of our souls we

may wait upon God, attentive to the faintest whisper of His Holy Spirit. He may lead a soul along the way of thought which S. Paul commends: "*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be praise, think on these things.*"¹ And through these things He will convey the deep knowledge of God. The Divine love will both fill and raise the soul that is occupied with the elements of spiritual beauty. The centre of all pure loveliness is God. Beauty is often degraded by association with evil; but in itself beauty belongs to God. Our part is to redeem it from evil, and use it for the high and holy ends which He will make known to us. When we use all beautiful things as Divine gifts, or as tokens of His presence or His passing, they become helps to the soul seeking by love. They tell of Him, or they lead to Him; and no one acknowledges their assistance more readily than the soul who, having used them well, passes beyond them in the vehement desire of love.² That they play such an important part in the mystical life is sufficient proof of their Divine origin and appointment.

How wonderful are the voices of nature when with consciousness of the mystical element we listen to them! They are low and sweet, powerful and grand. They arrest us. They soothe and refresh the soul. They mingle with the deepest and most reverent

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² Cf. *S. John of the Cross*: Sptl. Cant., stanza v.

thought. But they do not pervade the innermost realm of spiritual apprehension. Rather do they preserve the interior silence; for the secret of their music is the silence of God, that to which we hope to come. Nature's harmonies are the songs of creation. We may join in them, and through the subtle sympathy which unites us to every form of life, contribute our share to the whole; or we may hold ourselves apart. But while we may contribute to the song of creation, we cannot cause it to cease even for a moment, though our mood be contrary to it. There is that in nature which is wholly spiritual, and ever aspiring to God. The pure praise of nature is without sin. We may transgress the spiritual law, and bind nature to the purposes of sin. The result is not praise. The secret silence of nature is invaded, and is lost. In nature by itself the Saint can rejoice; but with the base admixture of sin he can have no part.

This guides us to the right use of nature as a means to the highest ends for which God gave us being. As it came from His Hand, so it declares Him, and appeals to the best in man. The world of nature as such does not limit our perception of God; but rather conducts us to Him. The voices of the ocean, the whispers of the forest, the silence of the mountains, are suggestive of spiritual presences which, while they speak of God in His boundless power and love, His majesty and beauty, yet stand aside as the soul of man aspires to Him. They seem ever mindful of their place and ministry in the great ritual of created life. Their faces are to

the Throne, and they assist, but never arrest, the soul in its quest for the highest, *i. e.* for God in the silence which speaks of Him. So have the Saints known how to use created beauty and find therein the manifestation of the eternal loveliness of God. Their thoughts about it flash forth in Holy Scripture in short, rapturous words, but they never dwell at great length upon it. They hasten to contemplate the Lord of all. They pass through the ordered array, beyond the sensible pleasure, passing even the Angels—yea, perhaps obeying them—in their desire to worship God. Thus may a soul realize its place and part in the great offering of adoration. "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. There is neither speech nor language; but their voices are heard among them.*"¹

If we aspire to spiritual perfection we shall not be insensible to natural beauty; but we shall seek immediately to pass beyond it to the supernatural. We shall, perhaps, even seek the natural in order to mount upward to the supernatural; but in doing so we need to act with deliberate devotion, to use the means, but without resting in them. There is always the danger of seeking them for the sensible pleasure they give, and of mistaking the sensible for the spiritual; but we shall be safe if our seeking be with pure intention. There is in nature so much that is sacramental, and in the right use of it we find how near God is in His perfect sympathy with the soul that seeks Him.

The value of this spiritual use of nature will appear

¹ Ps. xix. 1, 3.

to every one who is rightly seeking the hidden sanctuary and preparing for its worship. It is the secret sanctuary of God and the soul, not remote from anything that declares His glory and His love; but rather centred within all that is of Him, open to the air of Heaven, but closed to the polluted atmosphere of the world. It is a sanctuary of beauty and of joy, because in it love finds its perfect utterance. In it there reigns silence, but it is a silence wherein all the joyous things of earth and Heaven are realized in the stillness of a Divine contentment, where all is in God, in Whom we may find all and possess all, because we are ourselves in Him.

III

Such trained use and enjoyment of the beautiful things in nature leads to the consideration of our attitude towards all created possessions, the objects and gifts which attract and please and hold us. They have their uses, but we may rest too contentedly in our possessions; and then they become no longer helpful to us in the spiritual way, but rather impediments. This is a matter of some importance to all who would pursue the way of perfection and seek the hidden sanctuary. It concerns our ideals of worship, the homage of our souls. Not all are called to religious poverty; but all are called to mortify the love of possessions. We may be careful and even zealous in devotion, and diligent in the practices of religion; but if we are secretly attached to our

possessions, we can never attain to perfection. The danger is greater than many imagine; the snare of riches is so subtle that without being rich we may fall through the desire for increased wealth. We may have few worldly possessions and goods; but we may cling tenaciously to what we have, and make them too much a part of our existence. We may forget the poor, and thereby miss the promised blessing.¹ We may do all these, until we become indifferent to the wants of others and insensible to their suffering.

But this secret love of possessions is a direct hindrance to the desire of our hearts towards God, because such love detracts at once from the homage due to Him; it absorbs a part of the *self*, so that the *whole* is not immediately given. Our homage lacks completeness. The testimony of the Saints may guide us here. Their words appear exaggerated to one who has never considered the spiritual effects of detachment and mortification; but their admonitions are justified by their own experience. They knew the attraction of earthly possessions; they felt the painfulness inseparable from renunciation; and they knew also the freedom of soul which true detachment wins. They perceived a Divine action towards themselves inspiring and encouraging their own efforts and desires for detachment from creatures, that God might be all in all to them. They anticipated a certain freedom in His service: "*I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.*"² To them the realization of this expansive-

¹ Cf. Prov. xix. 17.

² Ps. cxix. 32.

ness of spiritual life was necessary to their perfect attainment in love; for the love and will of God present to the soul a boundless outlook. "*Thy commandment is exceeding broad.*"¹ As we ponder their words we feel the attraction of that high and mystic state so familiar to the Saints. If we are willing to deal truly with ourselves we shall acknowledge the truth of their words. It is a matter to be dealt with by each one alone; for no stranger can appreciate the subtleties of our own secret dispositions. Only in communion with God can we truly know either our fault or the proper means to amendment.

Let the earnest, aspiring soul make examination of these points. Love desires a perfect self-expression. When, therefore, we make the offering of our love to God, is it with consciousness not only of imperfection—which is inevitable—but also of attachments to creatures which make our offering incomplete? Is there something lacking from the whole-heartedness with which we desire to offer? We make answer to ourselves in the deep of our hearts; yea, it is clear to us beyond all question as we know ourselves in the very light and presence of God. Guided by the Holy Spirit of love, we attain through a refinement of interior perception to the knowledge of the inherent necessities and requirements of love, and understand the causes of our own imperfection. It may be we have clung too much to the conditions of our state, or to our possessions, or we have lived in a world of fancy made beautiful to us through the indulgence of desires after those things which

¹ Ps. cxix. 96.

God has not given. "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*"¹

This region of fantasy is very dangerous to any one who, though outwardly mortified and apparently detached from possessions and pleasures, nevertheless dwells inwardly in a land of dreams conjured up by an unmortified liking for them. The heart is given up to its idols: how, then, can there be a true worship of God? If we are at any time attracted towards such vain imaginings, let us resolutely guard our hearts, and keep our love for our Lord alone. The perfection of love is first of all interior; its expression must be according to its inner reality.

The offering of love is often poor and imperfect, only because we do not concentrate our efforts on the attainment of perfection. We permit the influence of so many things which impair the integrity of our love to God. The knowledge of our fault is accompanied with a sense of difficulty as we resolve upon a course of readjustment which shall lead to the offering of a perfect love. We shall with patience approach this work, for it cannot be accomplished all at once. The old attractions remain, even though we are changed in our attitude towards them. We shall need to deny ourselves again and again, refusing the gratification of sense, checking the indulgence of fancy, and turning from each inducement with holy determination and pure aspiration. Such acts of devotion will become effectual as means of detachment and, we add, means of grace. The more lovingly they are performed, the more evident will be the

¹ S. Matt. vi. 21.

blessing of God; for He ever regards the pureness of the soul's desire towards Himself. We must, therefore, become detached in desire if we would overcome all the obstacles in the way of pure love.

Of this we may be sure, that only as we seek the Divine satisfaction of the Sacred Heart shall we feel any satisfaction ourselves. Our restless desire for fuller experience of His love continues so long as there is anything in us that detracts from the wholeness of love's self-oblation.

"Lo, naught contents thee, who content'st not Me!"

If in all things we contemplate the possibility of greater love to God, and direct all our powers to its attainment, the very dangers of the way may be as goads urging the soul forward to its own perfection.

IV

The preparation of the soul for its entry into the hidden sanctuary is a spiritual work divinely directed. The soul, as the priest within its own temple, must be cleansed, arrayed, and adorned after a Divine manner. That part which is accomplished through renunciation and mortification is in itself great and important. The soul in its detachment offers itself in response to the inward call, and directs its energies to the achievement of love. But for so high and pure a work there is needed more than natural power, for "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*"¹ In the very attempt to reach them

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

and understand them, we realize our need of supernatural aid. The things of God are "*spiritually discerned.*" His grace must empower the soul, or it must fail in the presence of Divine realities. But it is not the will of God that we should fail, but that we should be made strong to contemplate those realities, and free to move with living purpose of love in relation to them. We are called to high and priestly service, which we shall perform in the power of the Holy Ghost and the exhilaration of His love. It is service which becomes only the more joyous as the fruits of grace increase within the soul.

We need, therefore, to estimate aright the effects of our own spiritual acts, and chiefly our use of the Sacraments of the Gospel. We must understand their place in our lives as "effectual means of grace," and use them with loving carefulness to that end. We can never dispense with them. Even within the hidden sanctuary itself we need the Sacraments. Even though we hope to advance, to move in the ordered service of love from court to court, we shall prove how truly we need the Sacraments. It is the experience of advancing souls that they need them even more than in the earlier stages of the spiritual life; for the increase of grace may not be hindered. If there are exceptions to this rule, they should be considered on their own merits; they are not always above suspicion: as when a person thinks to have outgrown the Sacrament of Penance. But we must for the moment consider them as essential to our preparedness for the right understanding of Divine things.

Sanctifying grace is the Divine gift to the soul through the Sacraments; and upon that as a foundation is built the superstructure of the spiritual life and, we may add, of true mystical life. Catholics do not need to be taught this. They know the mystery of the Sacraments through the very clearness of their love. Their mystical knowledge, whatever it may be, is an integral part of their sacramental experience. But for the sake of others be it said: there is no true Christian mysticism that ignores the Sacraments; while a truly lived sacramental life must always be open to mystical experience. The catholic can never define a line of demarcation between the sacramental and the mystical. There should be a will to recognize, and a readiness to receive, the mystical. If there has been, and is, a tendency to neglect the mystical in the natural and proper protest against much that is false or pernicious in popular mystical teaching, we are also in some danger of going too far. There is a true mysticism which the Catholic Church knows, approves and protects. It is not fantastic, but sober and balanced, because the Saints, in whom it has been most remarkable, have been so trained and disciplined that their very teaching concerning it has been too severe for such as are weakly imaginative. It is the science of the spiritual life as tested by heroic souls. It is the science of Divine love in its strength and beauty.

In the New Testament Scriptures sacramental and mystical teaching are intimately related. The apostles who are foremost in proclaiming sacramental truth, S. John and S. Paul, are themselves mystics

of the highest order. The Old Testament writers also, whose teaching and experience were most clear and definite, were likewise mystics. Catholic mysticism is no new discovery, but rather the continuation of that which runs through Holy Scripture from its beginning to its end. It is the experience of souls in their relation to God, conveyed in language which they understand who pursue the same spiritual way, inspired by the same compelling love.

It is all-important, therefore, that we should know ourselves and realize our advantages and blessings in the way of the Sacraments. It is our sure ground of safety. It makes all after experience the more reasonable. If the soul is strong in sacramental grace, and burning with love to our Lord, Who is known in His sacramental presence, there is a development of interior life; and it will in some ways be advanced on the mystical side. What is that reality of life and power which we feel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament but a Divine certainty apprehended by a developed mystical sense? This is an aspect of the sacramental life which we should not forget, though we must be careful not to exaggerate it. In Holy Baptism we were born again, and the new life was none other than that in which we are to know God, enjoy Him, attain to high union with Him. In Confirmation we received the fulness of spiritual gifts, and were made strong for spiritual endeavour. In Penance we are renewed in cleanness of heart, the state essential to the vision of God. In Holy Communion we are nourished by the Heavenly Food, the Divine Sustenance given con-

tinually to souls in the wilderness way of this world. Reverent attention to the truth of this, and loving effort to realize the spiritual dignity, and richness, and power which are the immediate effect of the sacraments upon prepared souls, and the humble, yet joyous, recognition of all within ourselves, should lead to a profound sense of possibilities and responsibilities. What is the purpose of all we have received if it be not that we should enter into simply loving, and actively living, experience of God? And that which follows will be mystical knowledge of God.

A question may be raised here : Why emphasize the value of the Sacraments in preparation for the hidden sanctuary when they must continue to be sources of grace and enlightenment to the end of our earthly life? The experience of the soul in the hidden sanctuary must, in a sense, follow upon the faithful use of Sacraments, and also increase as the Sacraments are used. The Manna was given before the Israelites possessed the Tabernacle, or knew of the mysteries of Divine worship and service which afterwards centred there. The Tabernacle witnessed to very wonderful life with God; and apart from all that preceded its erection would not have been, we think, understood. So with the soul that would know God in interior ways: a preparation is required, sanctifying grace must be the beginning of that knowledge, and the enablement of the recipient.

We may consider, therefore, our deep need of these two Sacraments in particular, Penance and Holy Communion, if we would rightly approach and enter the hidden sanctuary. Truly we shall never in this

life pass beyond the need of them, and their effects upon and within the soul will become so evident to us, and so desired by us, that we shall but seek them the more in order that we may become more interiorly prepared for our priestly service. Let us view the way, the secret inner way of the soul within its own consciousness, and mark the Divine leading, and the call of Divine love, to interior clarity and simplicity. It is very plain to us, and very attractive; and even its greatness is not discouraging, for it is an appeal to love—and pure love is unafraid. But it seems to us that we must pass directly into that state by a penance that shall be a very passing of the soul beyond the inferior likings and movements of our nature, separating us more completely unto God and the fulfilment of His will in us. This is a true desire inspired by true spiritual vision. It is a strong impulse of love which should not be repressed, for it should lead to great things in the working of Divine love.

What is gained is a glimpse of the pure light of the hidden sanctuary, and we must needs pass the shadows of our disordered lives ere we may rightly enter into that which appears open to us. The full renunciation of the self, its follies and its sins, will set us free from our greatest hindrances, while the cleansing of the Precious Blood will remove the stains which the very light of the sanctuary renders but the more visible. The light within is the light of God, in Whose presence all is revealed in just proportion of guilt. *“Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy coun-*

tenance."¹ It is His bearing with us in the revelation of our sinfulness which enables us to bear with ourselves; therefore the grace of contrition is never without encouragement. In true contrition there is the will to holiness on the part of the soul dealing with its sin.

We shall, therefore, use Penance and apply ourselves to it according to the love which impels us to seek the hidden sanctuary. We shall also live penitently and humbly, that the action of Divine love may confirm in us the first whiteness of absolving grace. He who would be confirmed in interior purity must abide in love humbly and contritely. He must distrust himself because of past failure, and hope strongly in God because of present grace. He must, moreover, be very patient in the midst of all external things, which may still have power to hurt or influence, while waiting for further intimation of his Lord's will.

In truth, the hidden sanctuary is becoming more certainly his who can thus continually perceive the interior light, and mark its increasing clearness, and withal finds his own desires more and more directed towards its perfection, and his efforts blessed to the same end.

And further, our penitence leads us with deeper reverence to our Blessed Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood. The realized necessities within ourselves can have but one satisfaction, our emptiness know but one filling—Jesus only. And in the painful hunger of our souls we seek Him Who

¹ Ps. xc. 8.

has said: "*He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*"¹ We make our communions with desire born of conscious need, we might even say of inherent necessity; for we need that very replenishing of our being out of the Divine fulness which is secured to the faithful in this Sacrament. The soul's greatest need is its need of God; and He recognized it, and provided for its satisfaction when He devised for us the Sacraments of the Gospel.

We make our communion. That which we do is an act of obedience both to an inward impulse and an outward command. We go out from ourselves to the Giver of all life and power. We go impelled by our soul-hunger to be filled with Him Who wills to be our Food. We go also in obedience to His command, trusting that He will accept our act of love, and bless according to His Divine intention, and not according to the measure of our conscious devotion. And He does this, establishing us in a certain union with Himself, and enriching us with sanctifying grace. Moreover, He confirms us in this if we lovingly respond; and always the inner light glows more purely, and our soul's strength increases, and holy desires are multiplied, and we incline with confidence towards interior ways. It is our Lord Who is Himself moulding the life after the very conditions of the hidden sanctuary. If we would dwell in His Sacred Heart, our hearts must be conformed to the love of His Heart, and through the fire which He enkindles. He desires to fulfil in us

¹ S. John vi. 56.

His Own word, that we may dwell in Him and He in us, that to us the hidden sanctuary may be the temple of our souls in Him.

Afterwards He will have much to unfold through the simple union of our souls with Him. His love in us, and our love in Him, will issue in wondrous worship and interior praise. But that is prepared for by every good communion now. Sacramental union is a heavenly grace, but within it must be maintained a secret work of love progressing towards the highest mystical union. Indeed, all experience is mystical that follows upon devout reception of the Sacraments; for it is always in some sort an experience of God.

V

When thus we do, and in the power of sanctifying grace are able to appreciate the opening vision, we perceive it to be simply love attracting us, and drawing us within its own unspeakable energy. By its power within us we are able both to perceive and understand those Godward activities which already we feel within ourselves; but which we see likewise in a vision of glorious possibilities for days to come. And we desire it all, for it is to us the sum of all good. That which attracts us is essentially Divine. It is the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; yea, the Beloved Himself, Who is ever the desired Object of love, the end of all our seeking. We feel His power, and know that in Him is our only Good. With the Bride we pray: "*Draw me, we will run*

after Thee ;"¹ that is, we will persevere in those desires which His love awakens in us; we will go out from all earthly hindrances, yea, from ourselves, in order that He may lead us to the secret treasures of His love; we will submit ourselves wholly to Him: "*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*"²

Let us consider and be wise. That which is in us is the beginning of that which shall be. We must live as already possessing. We must hold the treasure of our hearts with simplicity. We must avoid multiplicity of aims. Many are they who in the joy of first perceptions lose the balance of wisdom. They multiply devotions, and betray their anxiety by their self-consciousness; they are unrestful, as though afraid of losing the grace they have received. In short, they are unsimple. The first quality of faith, and the winning charm of love, is simplicity. Souls are often hesitating and fearful in unfamiliar experiences, and then the enemy seeks to hurt them through their fears, suggesting the doubts which lurk beneath their unsimpleness.

But behold a Saint. He sees in each thing, in every call, or duty, or experience, only the same clear leading of love, and finds in all the same joy in the Beloved. It is not the routine of pious duties and religious exercises that makes him, like S. Francis, so simply happy that he finds delight in everything, poetry in poverty, and buoyancy in humiliation, but rather the joy of his soul in his Lord Beloved; and

¹ Cant. i. 4.

² Ps. xvi. 11.

while he uses all means in the way of devotion, and even invents them, he soars in spirit beyond them. He is in the world as his Lord was in it, shedding the heavenly radiance of love, and exalting the common life to uncommon glory. And the secret of his radiant love is its simplicity.

Let us follow him and observe his life within the hidden sanctuary. We may do this by pondering the recorded devotions of such a soul. The Saints have not always succeeded in hiding their devotional life. We know sufficient for our purpose from reverent perusal of their records. They reveal the typical Saint. He is simple, joyous, strong, burning with love. But he is all this because he does not appear before God with divided attention. He has no care for the world's opinion. He sees only God, and every thought is directed to Him. The more he is absorbed in contemplation of Him, the more his little personal traits, the last effects of human pride in him, drop away. He is simple and natural before God. He stands humble, loving, and unafraid in his priestly dignity, while his spiritual sacrifice is pure.¹

But from contemplation of a Saint, turn in reverent regard to the Beloved Himself, the King of Saints; try to understand His inner life, His prayer. What could be more simply pure? We behold in His Humanity a simplicity corresponding to that of His Divine life, which He lived in "the Bosom of the Father,"² which is the Divine Essence, transcending all mortal vision, and hidden from all human under-

¹ Cf. 1 S. Peter ii. 9.

² Cf. S. John i. 18; iii. 13, and *S. John of the Cross*: Sptl. Cant., stanzas i., ii.

standing.” In the Divine life all is simplicity by reason of its perfection; and therefore in our Lord’s human life there was a corresponding simplicity through the Hypostatic Union. As, therefore, the union of the soul with the Beloved is perfected through love, there will be simplicity of spirit strictly corresponding to the degree of union.

We must, therefore, be ourselves simple through the very pureness of our love and self-forgetfulness before God. The knowledge of Him, increasing from day to day, should lead us to love. Our part is, then, to exalt that love, and make it our life, the end of all things, the goal we seek, and the way to it. We should forsake ourselves, going forth from ourselves in prayer, stripping ourselves of everything that might lead to self-deception before God. Our prayer should be the simple, but full, expression of ourselves. Nothing should be assumed, no imaginary robe should invest the soul, but only the precious robes of the virtues, and over all the mantle of humility.¹

Our care in all this will be rewarded with more abundant grace within the hidden sanctuary itself. But in the present also we prove its value. A “holy, pure simplicity” preserves the soul from the dangers of artificiality, and inclines it more to the ways of truth and candour. Simplicity is the note of reality. Its freshness and purity preserve the soul’s healthfulness. They who retain their simplicity towards God in love will be concerned with Him alone, and kept apart from evil in thought and expression.

¹ 1 S. Peter v. 5.

In a world where so much is unreal and fictitious religion has not escaped the taint. But religion is essentially simple and true and pure; whatever additions or worldly accretions there may be, they will be revealed by the simplicity of reality and holiness. If souls are hindered by the insincerity of some, they may be won by the "holy, pure simplicity" of those who walk with God in the light of love's eternal vision, and who, abiding in the hidden sanctuary, have always the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

VI

The entrance of the soul into the hidden sanctuary is not a sudden experience for which it is unprepared. It is rather an advance through the secret movements of love which God Himself directs. But although He works hiddenly, the effects of love are apprehended within the soul; for gradually it ceases to be attracted by anything that cannot be expressed in terms of Divine love. The soul breathes freely only when in the atmosphere of that love; it loves with increasing fervour, feeling an obscure presence of God. It desires the more open and revealed presence of the Beloved, and often aspires to it in prayer; while the more ardent become its aspirations, the more certain is it of "an infinite being hidden there, out of which God communicates obscure visions of His Own Divine beauty."¹ Because of all this, the soul is convinced that great good awaits it in the development of love.

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*: Sptl. Cant., stanza xi. 4.

And this is true; for as it is God's will to conduct the soul into the hidden sanctuary, He awaits the moment anticipated by Divine wisdom, and permits the soul to enter for a brief space, and to receive impressions of yet deeper spiritual realities, and be encouraged by holy intuitions, every one of which is ordained for some immediate purpose of His love. Such are the moments of clear perception in love which are the joy of advancing souls. They are transient, but real. They are severally graces which enrich the inner life. When they are lovingly received and responded to, and when they are followed by quickened desires after the virtues and by purer aspirations, God is wont to increase His gifts. The soul advances in love; and also knows somewhat more of that to which it aspires. It has felt the life with its power, not as external to itself, but as communicated and moving within itself. If there were ordinarily any analysis of such experience, which there is not, all this would appear as generally true; but otherwise the impression is of certain apprehensions of love, very sweet, very pure, but obscure in their depth. But love assures, hope inspires, and faith possesses, while the soul is self-abandoned to God.

But the great value of every such glimpse into the wondrous working of Divine love is understood if we regard them as brief visits to the hidden sanctuary, unveilings of the secret ways of God, pre-visions of the delights of the Saints. We cannot as yet realize the fulness of that marvellous interior life. It is enough if for the moment we may enter

and be still, letting the Divine atmosphere, the pure, soft light of the sanctuary, affect us by the sole power of the Divine love from which they emanate. What we are most aware of is the intensity of that love as a living force; such, for instance, as we feel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, when it is the power of the life that impresses us through the very stillness of the love that enfolds us. It is life, that is, living love, that we feel. What wonder is it, therefore, that we become only the more conscious of the imperfections and poorness of our own life as we enter? And yet that our Lord should have led us thus far is evidence of life and love which can be developed and brought to the desired perfection. His love assures and encourages, even when most of all its pureness is contrasted with our unfitness. Because it has pleased Him to give us a brief experience of that to which we aspire, we know it is His will to communicate that very life, yea, He is even communicating it when most we feel the pain of its revelation. As He renews His graces, something of the deep truth of our spiritual gain will enter into our souls; we shall know it in the love which will bind us more and more to that hidden life with God which is all our joy.

One thing strikes the soul in this experience: The hidden sanctuary is its own place, its rightful abode, its proper environment; for the deep consciousness of God which it then enjoys is pervaded by a sense of what is natural. It begins to realize its own affinity to Divine things. The sanctuary is its home. Having once felt all this, and perceived its essential

truth, the soul begins to live in it by love. It has yet many outward difficulties, and the attraction to sensible things is still great; but it no longer can be said to live in them, because it has ceased to love them. The soul is said to live where it loves. Loving the things of the Spirit of God to which it has been admitted, it desires them more and more, and directs all its powers towards their attainment, and so really lives where its treasure lies. "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*"¹

"Not where I breathe, but where I love, I livé;
 Not where I love, but where I am, I die;
 The life I wish must future glory give,
 The deaths I feel in present dangers lie."²

O Souls made for God, realize this first, that He alone can satisfy, fill, complete your life with and by Himself. Those inexpressible desires which His presence awakens within you are proofs of His working within you: He awakens the desire of love only that He may satisfy it. Seek Him Who is your true Lover and Lord. Desire your true home, wherein all His love and gifts of wondrous life will develop and perfect your own consciousness of being. Make your response to the love which attracts you. Let your action towards Him be definite, and not a vague, ill-defined movement. According to His leading enter the hidden sanctuary, that in the Beloved you may find all your spiritual powers in their simplicity, and rejoice that you can surrender them to Him. If through too free correspondence with the world's life and thought those powers have been misdirected,

¹ S. Matt. vi. 21.

² Robert Southwell, 1561-1595.

renounce that past exercise of them, and wait in lowly love upon your Lord, Who will call you to greater things through the infusion of His Own love, giving to all your powers a holy freshness of vigour.

Do not try to hurry this work of love; but be simply attentive to the least movement on the part of the Beloved. Be it yours to show readiness of mind, and a will wholly directed to the response that is fitting. If this be continued, your expectation will be rewarded. He has yet much to reveal and to unfold; so much to ask of you as He finds you willing, not only to receive, but to be disciplined also, that you may receive yet greater blessing. But let no necessary discipline rob you of the joy of your love. That which renders the soul more capable of good may surely be a joyous spiritual work, full of promise, and bright with radiant life. You are through all expecting the fulfilment of the inherent promise of His love. The presence of the Beloved will be your joy. *“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”*¹

¹ Ps. xvi. 11.



PART II

THE FIRST COURT : THE COURT OF SACRIFICE

BEFORE entering the hidden sanctuary, let us contemplate its magnificence. It is not unadorned, though hidden from the gaze of the curious. That can be no unlovely temple wherein God dwells by grace and love; although its beauty consists in correspondence to the perfections of His Being. True, its glories are within; but, like the Tabernacle of old, it attracts by its very existence. At times it would even appear peculiarly attractive by reason of the Divine Light which rests upon it. Its beauty is according to our own estimation of the life of which it is the centre. If we have great conceptions of the life in which God wills to be all in all, if love glorifies our whole interior vision, the beauty, the splendour of the sanctuary will appear. That which we behold is of God, in a measure heavenly, though so far removed from the actual glory of the desired presence of the Beloved which we wait for.¹ We behold that which conveys true impressions of the Divine glory. “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.*”² That revelation by the

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross* : Sptl. Cant., stanza xi.

² 1 Cor. ii. 9-10.

Holy Ghost is given by means of all that we may contemplate in the hidden sanctuary. There every apprehension of God, everything that is "of faith," reveals to the loving soul somewhat of the hidden Divine beauty.¹ All this is perceived as the secret of that magnificence which expands to the gaze of the faithful soul. The Divine presence is the secret of its radiant glory; but even that cannot be rightly contained within a soul which, like a sullied crystal, mars the perfection of the light which it transmits. But the soul of goodwill aspires to ever greater pureness, and so has ever before it the vision of the sanctuary as God wills it to be. Our life within it, our worship and service, must all be made so true that the vision may become more and more the truth of that which is apprehended through the transforming power of Divine love.

We approach that we may enter; and lo, all the promise, and all the magnificence, is seen to rest upon the solidity of the virtues, even as the court of the Tabernacle was surrounded by pillars set in sockets of brass; while the need of faith is symbolized by the silver employed about the pillars.² The virtues are essential, especially those which we call theological, before we can have sufficient firmness or stability of purpose for the life of devotion to which we are called.

We need also to be well grounded in the Faith and strong in spirit if we would enter the hidden sanctuary as our true home. Souls weak in the Faith and unstable in Grace could not support the life of interior

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross* : Sptl. Cant., stanza xii.

² Ez. xxvii. 10.

service and worship and bear all that the life of understanding and revelation implies. But, above all, we must love with great and increasing pureness; for as the secret ways of God are revealed only to loving souls, so we should seek to grow in love through interior exercise. God and the soul meet, and in that meeting we are conscious both of our own deficiencies in love and also of His tender concern for the perfection of our love. Some response, some effort, must be made, generously and gladly; and we need be in no doubt if we patiently receive the Divine teaching. But it will be secret; and the soul that would preserve it for the ends for which it is given must treasure it in the depth of its own love. The secret of love between God and the soul will not bear discussion, even between friends. "My secret to myself," is ever the word of the Saints.

We should endeavour to respond with great humility to every clear Divine thought communicated by the Holy Ghost. Pure love is always humble. It is enough if we can answer to the love we perceive in the opportunity of the moment. Nor should we consider the smallness of the occasion, for it is the love which glorifies the response and makes the action worthy. The sacrifice should be as real in a small matter as in one of greater consequence. In the court of sacrifice we shall learn the true values of all those things which our pride would lead us to neglect and despise. In the Heavenly Kingdom itself the acts of love forgotten on earth will shine in the splendour of their reward.¹

¹ S. Matt. xxv. 40.

I

The entrance to the hidden sanctuary is through the court of sacrifice. We must enter in our priestly character.¹ The soul is the priest in its own temple. All our care concerning the perfection of sacrifice is proper to the realization of our priesthood. But because the soul is in love conformed to the Beloved, it has, like Him, all that is essential to the sacrifice within itself. Here the offering is the soul itself, and the fire is that of love consuming it. Our first act, without which there can be no further advance, yea, the very condition of our presence within this court, is one of self-oblation. This was symbolized by the Altar of Burnt-offering. The sacrifice offered continually taught this truth: that all the most intimate revelation of God, all the mysteries of His love, and all that is to be won through prayer, can be ours only when our self-oblation declares our fitness before God. But as the Burnt-offering was not consummated until on Calvary our Lord made His perfect Self-oblation, but was renewed day by day in the fire God had kindled, so, because we are still only in the way of perfection, we need to renew continually our act of self-oblation. It should be our daily burnt-offering. The fire was always ready, for it was not allowed to go out.² Where love, divinely kindled within the heart, is kept burning, the daily sacrifice is the continual renewal of our inward fitness for the service of the sanctuary. This

¹ Cf. Ex. xix. 6; 1 S. Peter ii. 9; Rev. i. 6; v. 10.

² Lev. vi. 12, 13.

fire of love must be kept alive by unnumbered acts and aspirations, then the great act of daily oblation becomes possible.

Too little attention is given, in many cases, to this necessity of spiritual life. The act of self-oblation is sometimes forgotten, or carelessly omitted, or even withheld through consciousness of misdoing. Self-love leads at times into conditions, or circumstances, wherein the soul cannot make a true act of self-oblation, because of the pride which holds it from God. The flame of love has died down, almost needing to be re-kindled. But should we ever find ourselves in this state, we should act according to our better judgment, and obey the motions of the superior will, deliberately renouncing our self-love, and humbly seeking the renewal of Divine love; nor should we desist until we have attained through the victory of love to its truer power and expression in generous self-oblation. The priest must not fail to do his office; even the soul's sense of unfitness is met by a Divine provision. Let the soul be washed, cleansed, restored, and then approach the Altar of sacrifice, even as the priests in the Tabernacle.¹ The cleansing of the soul through penance may be a frequent necessity, even as the lustrations enjoined upon the Jewish priesthood. It would appear from this that God regards with special concern the whole-burnt-offering, the sacrifice and oblation of the self. And the reason is plain: He can work according to His Own desire only in the soul that is continually forsaking self and rising in love. He will teach the

¹ Ex. xxx. 17-21.

same truth in manifold ways, until He has won the soul to entire self-abandonment, and guided it in the purpose of most pure love.

It might seem sufficient for our sanctification to do no more than maintain this act of perpetual self-oblation, since experience proves the great blessing of it. And indeed it is most blessed. But seeing that God has set before us so much that cannot be known except by those who have entirely given themselves, we must trace the law of sacrifice through developing stages of interior life. There were free-will offerings made by fire, which the faithful of old were permitted to make. There will be many an offering which the loving soul will desire to make. The priest will be continually called to the altar. The soul will find within the court of sacrifice the means to that inward pureness and refinement of loving devotion implied by service in the inner courts. We may say truly that in order to enter daily into those inner courts he must pass always through the court of sacrifice. The worship is not intermitted in the courts. The fire of sacrifice burns while the service of prayer and worship in the spirit is proceeding. It is the exaltation and freedom which follows the act of sacrifice which makes the prayer so blessed. So the priest of the hidden sanctuary passes from the court of sacrifice to that of prayer, as in proper sequence. But for our purpose it is necessary to confine our attention for this section to the thought of sacrifice.

And here we may encourage ourselves by considering the Divine regard and blessing, bestowed wherever

the self-oblation is sincere. God looks upon the soul with peculiar tenderness, seeing in it not merely an impulse to devotion, but a certain likeness to the Beloved Himself, in Whom He was "*well pleased.*" As often as the soul makes a true act of oblation there is evident this interior conformity to His Spirit. This truth underlies the Divine character of all sacrifice that we make because we are children of God; for the place of sacrifice in our own spiritual life corresponds exactly to the place He has given it in His Own Divine life. A true act of self-oblation renews the likeness of the soul to God in the Divine expression of love.

This likeness to God explains the openness towards Him observable in perfectly surrendered souls. It is a grace common to the Saints, but found pre-eminently in Blessed Mary. As we contemplate it in her we perceive nothing that could obstruct either her vision or the Divine purpose in her. And as we prove from experience that the more perfect the act of self-oblation, the more clear is our spiritual vision, so the more simply do we perceive the beauty of the Divine purpose in our lives. We are assured by the love which flows into the soul of that which awaits us. He has so much to show us in the future. We shall renew the assurance by carefully renewing the oblation. Indeed the necessity for continual renewal of our offering will be realized in our experience of the effects of quite ordinary days, when we are only aware of the insistence of the world and the pressure of its concerns. How quickly the open outlook of the soul is blurred, and the effect of the morning oblation

dimmed! On the other hand, when there has been sustained oblation through many lesser acts of sacrifice, the smaller offerings of love, there has been no loss of clearness. Much depends upon our readiness to perceive the moment, and the manner, for some act of sacrifice. There is also a response which we should make to the attraction of holiness which we feel in the light and atmosphere of the hidden sanctuary. God Who dwells within, knowing the dangers which beset us, calls us lovingly to those acts by which we may advance to ever clearer light. They are acts of love. But it should be remembered that the principle of sacrifice is inherent in love.

We are in the court of sacrifice, but the mystery of the courts beyond is always attracting us, making itself felt even where we are. This is so because it is the same love in all. Presently we may be called to yet more interior service. We shall leave the brazen altar of sacrifice for the golden altar of incense; but the prayers of love will be the richer for all we have tried to do and offer in response to the love which inspires, demands, urges, constrains us in ways of self-oblation. While the incense pervades the court of prayer, the fire of our burnt-offering will still be burning. It is love working through all, and finding through our expression the way to another more interior and secret. This is the direction to be observed in all pure devotion; and it explains the silence and hiddenness of interior prayer. Self-oblation frees the soul from its own most dangerous hindrance in the way of prayer.

II

Self-oblation is more far-reaching as a spiritual act, and more glorifying to the soul than is always perceived. It is essentially an act of love, and is therefore to be identified with the whole work of Divine love. We recognize the unity of love, therefore we must recognize the unity of sacrifice. In the hidden sanctuary the faithful soul acts always in union with the Sacred Heart of the Beloved. The court of sacrifice is to her the sacred enclosure wherein she realizes the grandeur of Divine sacrifice. The dignity of her own priestly character consists in her identification with her Lord in His Offering; she participates in His work of love. In this court the soul contemplates the glory of self-oblation, and aspires to unity of intention with her Lord Beloved. The means to this end are provided by Him in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and through the communion of His adorable Body and precious Blood. If this Holy Sacrament is necessary to the true preparedness of the soul for the service and worship of the hidden sanctuary, it becomes also essential to that sustained union with the Great High Priest without which no part of our offering is complete. As He Himself has said: "*He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him.*"¹ There is no completeness of the individual offering except through this union. For a perfect offering there is needed a perfect love; as also the converse is true, "love's perfection standeth in love's sacrifice."

¹ S.^t John vi. 56.

But in active union with the Beloved through sacramental grace, what glory of love is revealed through every act of sacrifice! One in life and love with Him we receive impressions of Divine activities; we adore Him in the manifestation of love with which He delights us; we are moved to aspiration as the pureness of His Divine impulse awakens us to a sense of our own capacity in union with Him. Intuitions of the glory of His Own sacrifice blazing forth from the depths of eternal love combine in one compelling vision of the Divine Self-oblation, and we contemplate the sacrifice of His Mystical Body made glorious through the self-oblation of His members. And our own offering is provided for and accepted through our union with Him.

Because we are united to our Lord sacramentally our offering of the Mass cannot be separated from His priestly Divine action. At every offering He becomes mystically obedient unto death, and is mystically offered; yea, because present, because His adorable Body and most precious Blood are lifted up, there is in every Eucharist the setting forth of the continuance of His sacrifice for the living and the dead. Our intention should be none other than His.¹ But having assisted at Mass, and after Communion, does our interest in the sacrifice of our Lord cease? Does it not rather continue? Do not the numberless demands upon our love affect us in a higher way? What is it to be "a living sacrifice" if it be not the unifying of all life's offering through our union with Christ? And if we recognize the unity of sacrifice

¹ This does not interfere in any way with special intentions.

in the unity of our life in Him, we can hardly fail to perceive that unity of intention should follow, whereby through all work, and suffering, and sacrifice, we may be united with Him in His continuous Priestly work for the world.

Here, then, we perceive the sacred truth, which becomes more and more insistent as the ministry of the soul in the court of sacrifice develops. We are raised through love to actual participation in the sacrifice of Jesus, both in fact and in purpose. So wonderful and so glorifying is His purpose of love in His Own sacrifice, that His Mystical Body is transfigured in its glow as she is faithful in presenting on earth the great memorial at every altar; and the soul likewise of the individual member is transfigured as it is willingly identified with it. We may formally associate ourselves with the Offering and yet remain apart in spirit. We may miss the glory through failure of priestly understanding. And such loss must follow if we are indifferent to the will of our Lord in us after Communion, and to the purpose of love, which can be fulfilled only through our self-oblation. But who could fully declare the reality of love, wherein the Beloved and the soul behold together the work of love through the sacrifice which is His Own in her, and equally her own in Him? It is given to that one to perceive in truth past expression the spiritual fruit of the sacrifice. Nothing is lost that is given in love for love's Divine achievement. But how simply true must be our life within the court of sacrifice! As the hidden sanctuary is that wherein we share in all the interests of love

within the Sacred Heart of the Beloved, so in this court we become identified with Him in that work of love wrought for all mankind, and learn to value life in the highest terms of self-donation and self-oblation. In other words, to live is to love, and we live only as we love.

Let us realize all this, and through it the tremendous import of our own words when we formally present ourselves to God "a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice." If it be the offering of the natural life, still more should it be of the supernatural; for it is by grace and love supernaturally infused that we attain to the full dignity of our priestly service. "*A living sacrifice!*"¹ Only as living do we make an acceptable offering. Only as we are "*alive unto God through Jesus Christ*" do we make an effectual offering. But as we live by Him and in Him we are both sustained by grace and borne by love unto an effectual oneness with Him in the purpose of His Incarnation and the perpetual pleading of His Sacrifice. And because we live in Him, the natural life offers continually the opportunities which we may lovingly seize in our desire for true self-oblation. There are the vows we have made: we bless God for the grace which enabled us to make them, and for all His blessing upon them; but we know also the cost to ourselves. We are joyful in the work of life, and aspire to greater things through the power of the Holy Ghost; but we have experience of weakness and discouragement. We are glad in the gifts of natural affection which impart so much beauty to

¹ Rom. xii. 1.

life; but we know also the inevitable sorrow. We experience the pleasures of living; but we know also the suffering—the pain of body, the suffering of soul which are never far away. How in all these may we be sustained in self-oblation?

The soul in union with the Beloved is called to be, like Him, a victim of love. The very thought is almost too great for us. In all sacrifice the innocence of the victim is requisite in order that it may be accepted. There is the need of pureness and freedom from sin, so far as the soul may receive through Absolution and preserve by grace. Then, in union with the Beloved, all the soul's offering is enriched with the merits of His innocence, and thus we may aspire to become victims of love. We must look away from ourselves to Him, in every moment of conscious oblation seeking His glance of love. That look of the Beloved attracts us to the paths of His Own will; for He will not allow the offering of the loving soul to be without purpose. We are not to regard the pain of our offering, nor look at our cross; but rather give the whole attention of love to Him, "in order that nothing may hinder the glance of the soul from being dissolved in the Glance of God."¹ If we love we shall inevitably suffer; but the suffering itself must be love. It is thus we may be sustained in self-oblation. And if it appear too great for our aspiration, let us reflect that upon the perfection of our service within the court of sacrifice depends our fitness for the courts to which it admits the faithful soul.

The daily sacrifice, the daily Communion, may be

¹ *Spiritual Journal of Lucie Christine*, p. 147.

the daily renewal of our life in the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and as that is realized, the daily renewal of aspiration follows quite simply. And oh, the joyous uplifting we may experience through the pure aspiration of love! It reaches far above and beyond all the consciousness of weakness, and bears us away from self-contemplation and all its snares and hindrances. Because we live in the Sacred Heart our aspiration is that of the Beloved, Whose very thought issues in that strong desire of love which ascends only to mingle with the myriad aspirations of His Mystical Body. The heart of His Church swells with the life and love which from Him flow for the exaltation of the humblest who love Him.

III

While in this court we are directed towards a Divine conception of sacrifice; we are not all at once proficient in priestly service. There will be much discipline, and many a hard encounter with self, before we arrive at the perfection of self-oblation. But love attains to power through the demands made upon its generosity, and is never so Divine as when the "all" is given. The soul in that moment of supreme self-donation becomes god-like. This is the dignity with which God wills to invest the faithful soul in this court of sacrifice. As we look around we may contemplate the souls who pass in their service through this court. How great they are, how pure and strong, how humble, as they go their way unconscious of the lustre of their sanctity! But as we

follow them attentively we perceive how erectly they bear the dignity of suffering; and there is not a Saint but he bears the evidence of that distinction. There can be no sacrifice without suffering; but through sacrifice the soul rises above the pain, and soars to a height of love which at once glorifies it. There may be suffering without the glory of sacrifice, but that indicates an absence of love. Love regards pain as a means to an end. Love abides by the Altar in preparedness for the sacrifice. They in whom such love is found follow their Lord Beloved most joyfully in the way of His Cross. They regard it as a signal honour to suffer, because in their suffering they are so marvellously assisted in the way of union. Some have even regarded the absence of suffering as a calamity. They have deplored it as a loss of Divine favour, attributing it to failure or fault in themselves. How simply pure must have been their love! So in the *Dialogue* of S. Catherine of Siena we read, "In bearing tribulation they find pleasure, and not having it they suffer pain, fearing that I reward not their well-doing or that the sacrifice of their desires is not pleasing to Me; but when I permit them many tribulations they rejoice, seeing themselves clothed with the suffering and shame of Jesus Crucified." ¹

From contemplation of the Saints we turn with truer understanding of our own imperfect service and limited sacrifice. God regarded them in their love and faith and saw them strong in spirit. Regarding them He endowed them with the virtues which

¹ Chap. lxxxix.

merited yet greater love. But as higher graces require for their reception an increasing pureness, they attained to them through greater suffering. Because the suffering issues in that pureness, it is itself blessed. Therefore we say the Saints are found worthy of suffering. This is not an exaggeration, for it is borne out by the spiritual history of souls. They whom God calls to great things He calls also to suffering; and so our Lord declared of Saul of Tarsus, "*I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake.*"¹ Thus He defines the way of interior sacrifice for each soul whom He loves. And as with the Apostle, so also with all who accept suffering in the spirit of self-sacrifice, their love is rewarded with further graces. Their conformity to the high purpose of God draws to them His loving regard.

In this court we not only are called to render our priestly service, to offer our sacrifice; but also to learn through the higher experience of love the deep meaning of sacrifice, and grow into that degree of love which shall make our own acts consistent with the Divine idea. This calls for greater energy of soul in one who perceives it aright, and great courage in one who would be faithful. We understand that God is wont to bestow graces on one who, enduring suffering, rises to high devotion. Let us look to the other aspect of the question. We lose as often as we fail in response to the implied call in our trials. We are too readily pleased when they cease. We do not always realize that when the trial is withheld

¹ Acts ix. 16; cf. also S. Matt. xx. 22.

there may also be some withholding of grace. Unwilling in our self-oblation we are even refused the opportunity which might have been blessed; God in His mercy not giving that, the rejection of which would but make us more blameworthy in His sight. They who do not sufficiently conform themselves to the will of God can paralyze the intentions of His grace regarding them; because God in His mercy often abstains from sending us trials which He sees we are not prepared to bear properly, yet which, if we could have borne them, would have been the condition of new graces for us.

“No doubt it is in accordance with this truth that it often happens that after we have made an act of entire and generous abandonment to God He sends us some sorrow; our prayer having undoubtedly drawn down the cross, and at the same time the grace to bear it with love.”¹

Thus we may learn the danger to which we expose ourselves when we ungenerously draw back from the trial. But there is another and quite different attitude, in which we trace a real love which through humility rises to certain greatness in self-oblation.

A mystic glory pervades the court of sacrifice. Graces abound. God is so near; He penetrates the glory and the grace, making Himself known. The very touch of this experience inspires the longing for that perfection of love which rewards the perfect sacrifice. But this very longing has its secret pain for many a loving soul. The vision is not near, the reality they desire is yet distant, in the midst of so

¹ *Spiritual Journal of Lucie Christine*, p. 32.

much that tells of the glory of love, and of the participation of the soul through sacrifice in the very joy of the Beloved, there is a shrinking within the consciousness of unreadiness. The anguished cry of the soul is: "I am not worthy to suffer; therefore all this is far from me." What comfort is there for pain of love like this? The suffering soul must accept the pain of this secret humiliation, and offer it gladly with a renewal of self-oblation, and with fervent aspiration. The Beloved, as He regards the sufferer, will accept the love, and give the grace to suffer. Thus it must be that the soul accepts and uses to the highest ends of love every pain without preference; for in order to show itself worthy the soul must forsake itself. Humiliation must always accompany suffering. There is the altar always at hand, and we must immolate ourselves. It matters not at all if the occasion be small or great; and sometimes the self is most truly offered in small things; for pride affects to despise the small things. But let us always suffer in silence, otherwise we may but take back our own offering. The secret and hidden service is ever blessed of God;¹ and they who know most intimately His love will most carefully maintain the attitude of reserve. "To love to suffer, to keep silence, this is the secret of the lovers of Jesus Christ."²

Worthy to suffer! When once we have experienced the pain, let us go beyond it in the determination of love which will not delay to give its best, to bear the burden of the day, humble as to itself, yet

¹ Cf. S. Matt. vi. 1-6.

² Blessed Margaret Mary.

strong in aspiration. Let us aspire to love, and God will give the rest. By the simplicity of our love we pass, without perceiving it, into the company of those who, loved of God, love Him best when giving Him most. Stay not at the thought "I am not worthy to suffer"; but rather look upward with simple desire towards God: "Give what Thou wilt, that I may become what Thou wilt." This is not to say we should ask for sufferings. Let us ask for love, assured that He will never withhold the cross from those who love Him truly. It is not the counsel of the Saints that we should ask for suffering. We do not know that we have the patience to bear greater trials than we have. But to ask for love, and then to persevere in it, is the sure way to the highest according to the will of God.

IV

Love is the beginning and end of all sacrifice; and our Lord has declared that love is proved by sacrifice: "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*"¹ The demand for this supreme act of self-sacrifice may never be met; but our self-giving must, nevertheless, be the proof of our love. We have our friends and others who are in some way dependent upon that service of love which we may render. Do we always remember that proof of our love for them must be given to God as well as to them? The sacrifices we make for their sakes should be made as acts of devotion

¹ S. John xv. 13.

within this first court of the hidden sanctuary. Offered there upon the holy altar, they avail for the well-being and sanctification of those we love. This truth, inspiring and beautiful as it is, is yet not generally recognized as it should be. In the mystical body the members are mutually dependent, they suffer, or rejoice, together.¹ The self-sacrificing love on the part of one affects the many. But it must be offered to God, a spiritual offering, if the perfect result is to be seen.

The love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus burns in the hearts of His true lovers. Every demand made upon their love is also a demand upon His love in them. If they realize the oneness of love between themselves and the Beloved, they will meet all demands upon the high ground of that union. They will consider first how the Divine love can be satisfied, and although they respond to the human claim, it will be by way of response to the Divine claim. Moved by what they feel of the impulses of love in the Sacred Heart of their Beloved, they will offer all to Him, that, together with His sustained oblation of love, their efforts may be accepted and made available for the good of others. Thus the priestly service of the soul is sustained. And this applies to all the ministries of love regarded in their spiritual character.

Love claims to participate in the joys, hopes, aspirations, successes, blessings of those we hold dear. How often may not our love rise to God the Giver to win for them the grace to use all to the highest

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. xii. 25-27,

spiritual ends. Equally love will claim to bear the burdens and sorrows of the one loved. How brave and strong is love when it hides the pain it bears for that other, inspiring the courage it scarcely maintains, taking the burden of cares, and weeping alone ! How like the love of the strong Christ it becomes when it mourns over the sin of a loved one, strives for him in his days of temptation, pleads with and for him, spends itself in secret with God in his behalf ! These are of common and daily experience. Every faithful lover of Jesus knows something of these demands. Every priest knows it ; and they most of all, for it is their part of the burden of the Sacred Heart, it is their privileged share in the Cross of Jesus.

Ours it is to offer as we may for all these, our love, our sorrow, our penitence, our efforts, and spiritual acts. We should make our sacrifice with strong purpose of love and with clearest intention. We must be strongly loving and full of faith in our acts of reparation ; not shrinking when our Lord permits us to feel His Own pain, for that is His surest mark of approval. We must offer for the erring, suffering, sorrowing ones the pain we feel on their account, not regarding our own profit, but rather in pure prayer aspire with the Beloved to the very satisfaction of His Heart in them. In this same spirit we shall offer our communions for them, and plead as often as we may the merit of our Lord's Passion in the Sacrifice of the Mass. These are all spiritual acts, and often they will not be appreciated by those for whom they are undertaken. The enemy will suggest that we are labouring and suffering in vain. The

self will cry out in us; but let it be subdued. The offering of love that is made in union with Christ in the loneliness of Calvary, in the pain of utter self-noughting, will not be lost. It will avail. The fruit of it may not be seen here; but it can be left with the fruits "*laid up*" for the Beloved.¹

In all this there is to be found the spirit of our Lord's words: "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*"² The more truly we live as we love, the more will our sacrifice be the giving of the life. Within the court of sacrifice we are nothing, we fail of our priestly calling, until we immolate ourselves. The glory of priesthood is reached through sacrificial service. The soul as the priest within its own sanctuary has the double distinction, being priest and victim in one. Thus are we to become like our Lord Beloved, Priest and Victim. To what high dignity of union is not the soul called to aspire in this court of sacrifice! There is the call and there is the grace. Moments of exultant love, touches of ineffable union, reward the most faithful here. The intuitions of Divine love which accompany their sublime acts of interior self-oblation are past expression, and yet this court leads but to others with more wondrous graces. But let us not leave it until the High Priest Himself, our Lord Beloved, lead us onward. Already He is near, revealing Himself in the glory of love to the soul in whom He discerns the completeness of sacrifice. The soul looks through the mingled fire and vapour of self-oblation, and sees the Beloved in His beauty,

¹ Cf. Cant. vii. 13.

² S. John xv. 13.

serenely joyant in the acceptance of the Offering, and, meeting His look of love, is satisfied. The soul and the Beloved are one in the completeness of love.

V

Love is never satisfied with what it gives. It is ever probing the possibilities of higher self-expression. And, true to its Divine origin, it turns unerringly towards sacrifice as at once the readiest and most noble of means. The rapture of love in union with its Object contains within itself the impulse to sacrifice. Through all stages of its growth to perfection it leaps to sacrifice, as though re-born to higher activities. There is a mystical re-birth, the very pain of which is above all preceding experience in the refinement of its joy. It fulfils its purpose by some supreme, and indeed sublime, sacrifice, a work in which God and the soul only are concerned.

We do not find proof of this sacrifice of love, with which we are now concerned, in any external matter, except by implication. The outward sign of the soul's interior oblation, the grand achievement which proves it, hides at the same time the spiritual part, for that is too divinely tender to bear exposure. Indeed the sacrifice may be so wholly of the spirit that it cannot be externally known. It cannot even be declared, except in mystical language which they who have experience may understand; and it is certain that in no other way can some inspired utterance be received. We think we understand a Saint, but we know only so much as we see. And dare we

even pretend to know that? There is that which lies behind his words, an apprehension of reality, a treasure of knowledge, of which we are fully conscious, even when we fail to draw it forth. The certitude of a Saint is a supernatural characteristic. It is his own as he abides in the Divine love. He cannot impart it. "My secret to myself," he says; and that secret is the most profound when concerned with sacrifice.

Let us test this. "*Set me as a seal upon Thine Heart, as a seal upon Thine Arm,*"¹ cries the Bride to her Beloved. She has aspired to a method of sacrifice almost beyond expression. Love has first exalted her, and then taught her the secret. It will be found simple enough to those who are prepared to follow her in love.

The Bride, in contemplation of her Beloved, perceives not only how infinitely He merits to be loved, but also the magnificence of His love. She finds no words to describe His beauty and glory. She desires to see Him honoured by the universal acknowledgment of His love; but seeing Him not so honoured she is grieved. What effort could be too great, what sacrifice too absolute, if that could be won! She would have the Sacred Heart satisfied by the gifts of love and devotion from all creatures. But knowing that, on the contrary, the Heart of the Beloved is deprived of the love which is His due, she would make of her own love an offering, and be herself a sacrifice for love's sake, if thereby the desire of her heart may be realized. "*Set me as a seal upon Thine*

¹ Cant. viii. 6.

Heart, as a seal upon Thine Arm." A seal is a mark or sign of attestation. See to what this soul aspires. She would be herself the seal or sign by which the Beloved may give proof to the world of His Own love, attested through a living soul. Wondrous indeed is the power of love realized by the Bride within herself!

But if this be an aspiration of love, it is no less an offering in the highest spirit of sacrifice. The Bride gives herself to be borne upon His Heart; but this implies her utter self-forsaking. She has risen in love beyond the thought of self, and for herself seeks nothing. The whole witness and testimony of her life is placed at the service of the Beloved. That which declares His love hides her—is, in fact, the hiding of herself.

"Set me as a seal upon Thine Heart, as a seal upon Thine Arm:" on Thy Heart, attesting Thy love; on Thine Arm, attesting Thy power. Thus is the soul wholly surrendered and given to the Beloved. It is not on her part a cessation from the activities either of love or grace. There is needed rather a more entire and perfect life of love, for it is love marvellously strong and pure that rises continually above the motions of self; and such must it be if it is to be fixed and unbroken as a seal of attestation. There is needed also a perfection in grace, and especially of perseverance; for without this grace the virtues are not developed. But before the soul can aspire with confidence to be set as a seal upon the Arm of the Beloved, the virtues must be found in combination and bound together by love. Great is

then the soul's strength, as indeed it needs must be, if it is to be the sign and attestation of the power of the Beloved.

How great is the sacrifice involved we may understand as we try to follow the soul in its growth in love and grace. She must grow marvellously as she rests upon His Arm, His Heart, and yet she must continually surrender all to His use. Only in hiddenness can she sustain that high dignity to which she has aspired. We cannot conceive of a more interior act of self-oblation, or one that requires such an unbroken sense of the high prerogative of love in an individual. It can be possible only in a high degree of union. But that it belongs to this court of sacrifice is proof of the unity of life within the hidden sanctuary. We pass from one to another of the courts, and back again, as sacrifice and prayer are mutually illuminative of the higher ways of love. From the ascending degrees of sacrifice we pass to corresponding degrees of prayer, and gaze with quickened powers of vision into the far distances of our spiritual kingdom.

What wondrous love is His Who can suggest such sacrifice to His Own! We could not of ourselves aspire to anything so high, however daring our love; but we may be moved to such devotion by our Lord Himself through the inspiration of His love. We may understand it as the desire of His Heart communicated by some secret touch of transforming love. This is no fancy of a mind overstrained in devotion; but an intuitive perception of love's high prerogative to give; and the giving is after the manner of our Lord's Own Self-forsaking on our behalf.

This degree of perfection is itself the result of past sacrifices; and it is not maintained without trials. Such high and sustained giving of love demands from the soul the most determined self-forsaking, the foregoing of all gratification of the self. The humility of such an one must be profound and most interior. The living pain of sacrifice will not be abated. But blessed indeed is that one whose love is found equal to its aspiration. The Beloved accepts the sacrifice, and in so doing leads the soul of necessity along a toilsome way. He cannot fulfil the petition and grant the request of love without the testing of experience. It may be necessary even to purge the love which has been offered, to purify yet more the soul before He can bear it as a seal upon His Heart, as a seal upon His Arm.

We have had our own experiences of the love of Jesus, and have aspired to the highest response. Let us never doubt His approval and acceptance. But we should question ourselves. Do we perceive the requirements in our own case? Do we realize what our response involves? If we aspire to the perfect gift of love we shall *ask* to be made pure. The soul that is most exalted in love perceives its own need, and discerns a degree of pureness to be attained through yet higher modes of interior sacrifice. In giving ourselves to these spiritual necessities we attain to the desired power of self-giving. We satisfy the desires of the Sacred Heart of the Beloved as we are conformed to His Own likeness in the self-giving of love. And if this involves for us, as it does, the death of self-love, the end is attained, for

we live while we die. God is wont to make the greatest, and even the most mysterious, demands upon the surrendered soul, the real meaning and significance of which may be hidden from others, and known only to the victim of His love, as we learn from the Saints.

VI

It might appear that all has been said, and truly that one is blessed who has attained to such greatness of desire in the way of sacrifice; but within all this there is to be understood an action of the soul itself more profound than anything we have observed as yet in the court of sacrifice. "The master of the work, in mystical life, strange though it may appear at first sight, is not God, but man. The person really at the head of it all, the one finally responsible, is each individual man."¹ As therefore the life develops, and the Divine action upon the soul becomes more intensive, so the individual is compelled to act with steadier will in order to secure the fruit of mystic grace. The soul enamoured of God longs to possess Him. But for a grace so Divine there is needed a pureness of soul towards which the will must be wholly directed. If this may be reached only through a sacrifice of the self so absolute as to be even hidden from all but the Beloved Himself, the true mystic will persevere in keeping his will at one with the purpose of his Lord. The Divine Lover asks of the beloved soul the greatest proofs of devo-

¹ *The Mystical Life*, p. 110.

tion, and tests its heroism to the uttermost, calling it to follow in a seemingly trackless way. Sometimes the soul will tremble, or halt at some moment when the desired Presence seems to promise an end to the trial. At times there will be blessed experiences, signal graces, but they must be left in obedience to a stronger impulse, a more imperative command of love. Clothed only in the virtues, but without consciousness of their beauty, this brave soul aspires to a pureness of love wherein the self is entirely forgotten. The Beloved is sought for Himself alone; and even the great joy of possessing Him, when it is reached, is consecrated to His Sacred Heart.

The Beloved Himself desires to be all in all to the soul He loves. "*His desire is towards me,*"¹ declared the Bride. If we contemplate Him as moved by that desire, we see Him seeking to win the soul to Himself; bestowing gifts and graces, with many and intimate proofs of His love; showing Himself bountiful, yea, prodigal in His love. If it be asked, why does He appear to make choice of souls to whom He gives more abundant proofs of love, we can only reply, that love has no reason but itself. At the same time, He doubtless beholds in such favoured souls a degree of faithfulness in love which fits them for the reception of yet higher love. If we were more careful of the hidden treasure of love, we should be more constantly aware of the Divine attraction. We should respond to the desire of the Beloved.

But also the Beloved desires to be Himself won by the soul. From the treasury of His love He draws

¹ Cant. vii. 3.

innumerable gifts with which He adorns her, enhancing her beauty, perfecting in her the elements of holiness; but withal in such a wonderful manner that her will is left free for the direction of her powers. As she directs her will aright, exalting Him as her immediate Object in the practice of every virtue,¹ she presents to Him that which is pleasing. He permits Himself to be won, the Creator by His creature. It is not presumption to say this; for it is but the truth declared by Himself: "*Thou hast ravished My Heart, My sister, My spouse; thou hast ravished Mine Heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.*"² He gives Himself to the soul, her Lover and Lord. It remains for the soul to give Him His rightful place. We accord Him the title "Beloved"; let it be that which He permits us to employ as signifying the love, ratified and secure, within which we are held. "*My Beloved is mine, and I am His!*"³

At this point, when we understand the most loving desire of our Lord towards ourselves, we should recognize the duty of responding with utmost faithfulness in will. Nothing should be permitted to obscure the issue of a love so high. We should resolutely exalt Him as the Sovereign of our hearts. This means the dethronement of self by our own act. How important this is will appear if we consider His coming to us at any time. There is always something in His attitude towards us which is above

¹ This is in a measure true of all virtues, even of those which are not "theological," when we practise them out of pure love for God.

² Cant. iv. 9. Cf. *S. John of the Cross*: Sptl. Cant., stanza xxxi.

³ Cant. ii. 16.

His gifts, whether of grace or of love; and in our eager acceptance of that which He gives we may even do Him dishonour by not regarding His attitude. What is it? It is Himself, patient in His love, waiting for the welcome we so often withhold. We take His gifts and rejoice in them; while too often our devotion ends in thanksgiving and a pleased sense of His loving-kindness. Let the reader examine this point, and his conscience in relation to it, and he may discover something more than failure—he may even perceive the cause of undeveloped love.

If it be so with us, wherein have we failed? In not trying to understand His desire. Is our love so poor that we can take His gifts *without desiring Him*? It might appear so; but it would be unfair to make any general accusation. It does, however, point to this: we ought always to open our hearts to Him, to receive Him according to His desire. We shall use His gifts as helps towards that completeness of devotion with which we desire to welcome Him. Each gift of the Beloved is a distinct expression of His love to the recipient; and the love is more than the gift, because it is Himself. Every such expression discloses the sentiment of His Sacred Heart towards the soul He loves; and should meet with a response which is nothing less than the soul's deliberate choice and declaration of love: "*Whom have I in Heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.*"¹ And this should be not occasionally, but always, when we have particular experience of His regard.

¹ Pa. lxxiii.

The natural result of this, as the habit is confirmed, will be an interior apprehension of Him as the very desire of our hearts, and of the truth that in love we must be ever seeking completeness in Him, that is, the perfection of union in which He becomes the *All* of the soul's desire. Not less than this can be our aim if indeed we would tread in the footsteps of the Saints.

Until this be accomplished the soul cannot rest in anything, no matter how great or beautiful, which is but a foretaste or promise of that which is yet to be. We cannot rest in any knowledge, or experience, or possession so long as faith bears witness to the unseen, and hope looks on to an eternal possession, and love aspires to its consummation. But each of these virtues enables the soul to express her desire towards Him as the Beloved. And He, seeing her desire, is well pleased. But oh, how much He will ask of her! He seems to show His love by the greatness and extent of His demands; and when He seems most near, and the longed-for consummation at hand, He lures the soul to greater sacrifices, making its love strong by means of its endurance. Can she leave untasted the chalice of His delight, lest for one moment the self should mar the pure aspiration of love? Truly for that is needed the discernment of unerring love, the confidence of settled hope, and the strength of undaunted faith.

And then we understand the Saints who feared lest they should lose their Lord Beloved by dwelling too much upon His gifts; who persevered in the dark night of their trial, sustained by the certainty of

love; for if the soul is aware of the desire of the Beloved, she will be no less sure of His Will in that obscurity. The love of the soul is then most certain, her hope sure, and her faith strong; for love witnesses to the reality of its Object. So in the suffering soul it witnesses to the Beloved, Who is faithful in love. Knowing His faithfulness, the soul fears not to forsake everything, even spiritual consolations, for His sake, and in order the more certainly to possess Him.

When has ever a soul so favoured of God as to be led naturally in the course of love to the obscure night failed? I say, naturally—that is, in the ordered way of the spiritual life. Failure might follow where one forced the way of the soul until a state was reached closely resembling in outward appearance the obscure night; a danger not far removed from any practice of false mysticism. But in such cases we should find not the perfection of virtues which accompany the true state; and so we might reasonably suspect their power to endure. The motive in such cases is not the simple love of God in which the true mysticism consists; but rather a self-love ambitious of the supernatural. The spirit of sacrifice is wholly wanting or basely perverted.

But in the true state we are to contemplate not the action of the suffering soul alone; but also of the Beloved, Who is watching in love, aiding with grace, and rejoicing in the growing perfections of His loved one. He knows the will which is set upon Himself, the love which rejects all but Himself; and when the moment comes He will reward with that full gift of Himself, the union in which He and the soul

will be together satisfied. But for the moment He waits; yet is the love of His Sacred Heart great beyond our highest conception, though hidden. The soul loves, knowing Him to be infinitely lovable, and by the supreme act of sacrifice glorifies His love. But He Who is infinitely lovable is also infinitely loving; only for the time we perceive a certain Divine restraint, the Beloved not giving the desired satisfaction lest the soul should be content, and so fail to rise to the supremest point of love's sacrifice which would make her eternal glory the greater. It is a wondrous love, so tender, so strong, and yet so unsparing, as though, knowing its capacity, He would raise the soul above herself; for there is a point beyond thought, reflection and knowledge, to which we may rise in love, in perfect self-giving; where, passing the bounds of sense, we catch the light of limitless life and love. And there the soul is content to give, and giving, finds her *All*.

The perfect self-oblation is thus made. There is no longer a trace of the self-love which could make the aspiration of the Bride other than a perfect one: "*Set me as a seal upon Thine Heart, as a seal upon Thine Arm.*"

VII

The court of sacrifice is not without its vision, which they who are simply obedient to love most certainly find. It is the vision of love revealed to love. There is about it nothing of the nature of miracle. God will assist the soul in miraculous

ways when and how He pleases; but we are here concerned with the ordinary ways of love. Sacrifice is the sublimest action of love; and, being love, the greatness of the act consists in the degree of self-oblation, and not in that which is merely visible or material. An otherwise insignificant act may be spiritually great. Sacrifice does not depend upon worldly opportunities or material advantages; or we should have known but few Saints. It depends upon the will of the loving soul. And this at once prepares the way of vision.

Every act of sacrifice results in the loosening of the bonds of self-love. The soul attains to greater freedom in the way of Divine love, while its conduct overflows with charity. Examples abound in proof of this. From the sacrifice we look to the glory of Divine love, which appears to us with arresting clearness. It seems to us to have come to us; but in truth we have been raised to it; our power of seeing has developed through that which burst through the bonds of self-love which held us in darkness. What we behold is love, what we feel is love, what we understand is love. We call it vision; but it is without form or image. It is more real and inspiring than any image. It absorbs the whole being. It is life within which is nothing that is not charity. Its light pervades the world, and we observe that they who do not perceive it are they who through self-love are encompassed by their own darkness. This is the light which in the court of sacrifice not only falls upon souls in their service of self-oblation; but also in a mystic way glows in them, and through their

lives upon each other to encourage and gladden. The vision and the glory are apprehended by all in their several degrees, the more perfect are almost transfigured by it, the less perfect are leaving the shadows to rejoice in the light.

Walking in that light, and sustained by the hope it inspires, we shall triumph over the weakness and fear of pain which would hold us back when love calls to sacrifice. The vision will glow with added brightness for every sacrifice made, and with our eyes held by its glory we shall account the cost to ourselves as little by comparison. When we are doubtful and afraid, let us contemplate the vision and not regard the suffering. Ours is the high prerogative of suffering that through love bursts into glory. "*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"¹ The pain of self-oblation is lost in the love that makes it; and that which is given becomes the crown of the Saint.

Sacrifice is glorious and glorifying; the illumination of Divine love which rewards it guides towards the interior ways of prayer. The priestly soul moves onward in the light to the next court, where other service is to be rendered and higher vision of love contemplated. In obedience, in humility, in profound love, let us follow.

¹ Rom. viii. 18.



PART III

THE SECOND COURT: THE COURT OF PRAYER

THE Court of the Tabernacle was open above; it surrounded the Tabernacle, emphasizing its holiness and the reverence necessary in all who would approach to enter it. Yet because therein was the Altar of Burnt-offering before the door of the Tabernacle, it had its own distinction and significance in relation to the whole sacred structure. We have adhered to this same plan in the mystical understanding of the hidden sanctuary. The life of sacrifice is to a certain extent open to observation. There is very much that is wholly hidden and secret in such a life; for the faithful soul withdraws from the notice of the world, remembering our Lord's warning against ostentation in devotion.¹ But there are some external conditions of sacrifice which must be manifested, and which are yet not designed to win applause. The cloistered life is one of sacrifice plain for all to see. The renunciation of wealth and rank by individuals for Christ's sake cannot always be hid. The open obedience of the Apostles when our Lord called them was a necessary witness to His right to their love and devotion. So it may be in numberless instances.

¹ S. Matt. vi. 1-19.

The soul's withdrawal from the open, broad ways of the world to the hidden sanctuary begins with sacrifice. The real hiddenness of love lies within all such external marks of spiritual service.

But it has to be borne in mind that we are still in the world, and under its observation. The very openness of the court of sacrifice implies this. And our faithfulness to all the requirements of this court, though we pass continually to the court of prayer, is the guarantee of our sincerity. The world, as it learns to appreciate the purpose and beauty of sacrifice, will not be slow to recognize its relation to prayer.

In order to understand this second court, the court of prayer, we must be less concerned with the externals of a devout life than with that which inspires the life. We cannot withdraw the veil which hides the secret of a soul in its relation to God. We cannot even penetrate the secret, for it can be known only to the soul and God.¹ But we may know the conditions of that hidden life and aspire to its secret. But the knowledge will be gained through mystical experience; that is, through love. We may profit by the examples of the Saints; we may absorb their teaching; we may be encouraged by the experience and sympathy of those nearer our own time and condition; but for all this, the court of prayer will contain for us a particular secret—the secret of our own souls. And only in the recesses of that court shall we learn even that. In this court it is not regulated vocal prayer that most of all engages us, but mental prayer. Many enter who fail to persevere. But if

¹ Cf. Rev. iii. 12.

we have prepared ourselves by penance,¹ and by the manifold acts of self-oblation inspired in the court of sacrifice have attained to pure love, we ought not to fail of the first duty in prayer. Prayer is essential to all that makes for reality in the spiritual life. Whatever good may result from it as a formal religious act, the highest good is reserved for those whose conception of prayer is that of love in conscious expression between the soul and the Beloved. All such expression tends with holiest inwardness towards the consummation of love. Hence the hiddenness of the soul's life within this court.

As the sanctuary of old was ordered by God for the highest spiritual offering, and all was appointed to serve the advancement of souls in the mystical life, so the hidden sanctuary is, according to this same teaching, to be ordered with intelligence. Everything must be used with true and loving intention. There are supernatural aids which the faithful soul will not fail to use. If we think how few were the objects within the sanctuary which arrested attention, and how bare it must have appeared generally, we must reflect that in the soul's approach to God only necessary helps are permitted; that which would be merely distractive is absent. It may convey the warning against any form of preoccupation of mind when we go to prayer. The soul that cannot bear the conditions which call for concentration of its powers and its attention upon the object of its love will never become proficient in prayer. Divine aids are provided, but no more than we shall need. "*My*

¹ Cf. Ex. xxx. 17-21.

grace is sufficient." Therefore we will apply ourselves to the rightful service of this court. We shall think of prayer as the great and absorbing occupation of the soul, that which constitutes its normal service. The hidden sanctuary is the spiritual house of prayer, and to it we should turn as often as need arises in the outer life. It is like the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the place where we meet God, forsaking our own judgment in any cause that we may be enlightened by His Spirit. "It is said that Moses had always recourse to the tabernacle of God for the solving of doubts and questions, and that he there asked the help of God, through devout prayer, for the perils and dangers, as well of himself as of the people. So shouldst thou enter into the secret tabernacle of thine own heart, and then ask inwardly with good devotion the help of God in all such doubts and perils." ¹

I

We approach the court of prayer with desire to enter. But before we enter let us note a certain Divine showing of the fitness of the soul that would stand within. As the Tabernacle, stately, and adorned to the last detail, rested upon sockets of silver, so the hidden sanctuary rests upon the verities of the Faith symbolized by the silver sockets. The superstructure was of varying degrees of richness and beauty, as the hidden life of the soul is protected by the virtues and graces of sanctity. The entrance

¹ *Imitation*, Book III. chap. xxxviii.

also had its meaning. Its five pillars were set in sockets of brass,¹ reminding us that the conditions of the court of sacrifice cannot be forgotten.² These fitly symbolize the courage and strength of purpose required in those who would enter the court of prayer. And here let the aspirant in the ways of interior prayer consider well his own purpose of soul, and the purity of his intention. When God called him to this high road to sanctity, He gave him the grace to advance. Has he responded with steadfast will? Has he taken courage? Has he been generous in his dealing with God? Or has his progress been delayed through weakness of will or lack of skilled direction?³ Prayer is the work of love; but the course of love is never without its difficulties; the aspiring soul is challenged to prove its love, at one time by sacrifice, at another by endurance of trial, or, yet again, by adventure. Some great souls are impelled by the spirit of adventure. They must be daring in their love. They must do more than give, and aspire to something greater than endurance—they must win something for their Lord. In all cases it involves some forsaking of the self, a going beyond the weakening suggestions of self-love, a standing apart and above, where the claims of eternal love are untouched by human conventions. The ideal presented is at once priestly and knightly. If we would tread the court of prayer we must wear the priestly robe over the soldier's armour. The victor in spiritual warfare finds his peace in the hidden sanctuary.

¹ Ex. xxvi. 37.

² Ex. xxvii. 10.

³ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*: "Ascent of Mt. Carmel," p. 4.

The soul of greatest courage, the noblest victor, the most generous lover, will be he who has overcome himself. This has been shown and taught by experience in the court of sacrifice; but in the court of prayer all that is most spiritual in the conception of sacrifice is developed towards that entire, and most pure, unselfishness in which the soul is prepared for the perfect union with the Beloved. Every provision of love within this court, every help given, must be met with perfect surrender on our part. We love God. But, let us remember, we love Him Who is infinite, eternal. We love Him Who is Himself *Love*. Therefore that can be no perfect act of love which is not an act of surrender, of abandonment, to Him, of submission to Him with desire to be so wholly immersed in His love as to have no wish, or thought, or feeling of our own. It may be difficult to make deliberately a perfect act of love, because of the subtle insistence of self-love. We should then, owning our weakness, with all our might *will* the perfection which appears impossible. We may offer, with that act of the will, our *desire* to give to the Beloved the homage and praise of pure love. We may thus deny the self and work effectually to its destruction. It may be possible under rare conditions to make an act of pure love, that is, without admixture of self-love; but it would be such a rapturous movement as to be wholly different from ordinary volitional acts. It would indicate a state of union. And with that we are not at present concerned.

To one so prepared in love the wonders of the court of prayer convey the idea of exceeding beauty. It

is a spiritual building, wherein the truths of the Faith are united with the virtues. They are, we know, truly combined within the soul itself; but they exist also apart from ourselves; for the time we stand within the hidden sanctuary of which these are the very foundation and structure. We are alone, the soft, mystic light fills the court; and for a while we can do nothing of ourselves—we must be still and silent, but not unresponsive. Let us with attention receive impressions as they are given. How vast is the sanctuary! How small the lone soul of the priest-worshipper! But it is our own place. He Who loves us has made it ours. The soul answers to its environment. Everything is fitly appointed, and adapted to the human spirit. And, as if showing the purpose of its separation, Divine love speaks with wordless power, penetrating the very secrets of the soul; God wills to deal with us by Himself in the confused light and dimness of silent contemplation. There is much He will teach and reveal by other means; but for the moment our part is to be still, to absorb, in the tranquillity of love, so much as He may will to impart. He will strengthen us by what He gives, even though we know not the nature and extent of His giving. Very humble must we be in our love; but it would seem that He holds the soul so securely in its separation that it cannot then think of itself. It is too much a part of the whole spiritual act to feel any concern about itself or its own thoughts. Let us rest as long as He may permit in this blessedness. And may He by means of it empower us to advance in the way of prayer.

In the court of sacrifice love discovers continually some fresh means for its own expression; but, as we saw, the means assumed more and more a spiritual character, the soul at last finding within itself the sole means of sacrifice. Love expresses itself in some act or sacrifice; but it gives thereby nothing more than a passing glimpse of its own greatness. Because it is of God¹ it has power, and richness, and beauty, with which it turns naturally to Him again. Hence the soul's progress in love is marked by its advance in affective prayer, and by a general movement towards a more interior and hidden devotion. This is the experience of the soul in the court of prayer. While there is much given for inspiration and guidance, there is nothing that does not tend directly to the exaltation of love as the supreme concern of the soul with God. As we enter we feel our weakness and our poverty. We have so little within ourselves that we cannot do as we would. We were not quite prepared for the separation, the stillness, through which there comes the pure attraction of the presence of God. Here there is no place for anything but love, pure, intense, purposeful, as it is identified with its Source through the abandonment of the soul to the welcome of Infinite Divine love.

How many have expressed their deep sense of this absorbing love. "*I sat down under His shadow with great delight,*"² cried the Bride out of her deep experience. "*My sole occupation is love,*"³ is the thought of S. John of the Cross as he describes the

¹ S. John iv. 7.

² Cant. ii. 3.

³ Spiritual Canticle, stanza xxviii.

state of a soul surrendered in love to the Beloved. "*Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God,*"¹ writes S. Paul, pointing to that hidden life of love in which the soul may truly realize itself in love. It is realization in love without anxiety. We need but to give ourselves to the service of our Lord in love as He provides within this court in order to attain to those higher movements of prayer which the loving soul must always ardently desire.

II

Among the characteristics of a well-ordered spiritual life are the deep silences into which the soul is taken, and which are made so blessed and fruitful. "The soul is in mystic silence," wrote S. Chantal, "when, speechless before other creatures and before God Himself, her inmost being listens intently; by this silence she gives great glory to God. The soul gains immense benefits from silence, for it loosens her hold on created things and draws her nearer to God, the sole source of purity." Silence, as we learn from the Saints, is necessary to us. Without it we cannot become proficient in prayer; for the higher knowledge, both of ourselves and of God, cannot be gained except in holy stillness when, without voice, the soul acts in the pure way of love, attentive, patient, and receptive, and by impressions, volitions and intuitions advances in the way of interior knowledge. Great care and most loving self-control are necessary, for this interior silence is not a grace, or gift, merely;

¹ Col. iii. 3.

but very largely the result of wisely governed effort. Any one who has persevered in the prayer of simple attention will know how true this is. But in their haste, or impatience, to know somewhat of exceptional favours, some, most unwisely, pass by the immediate needs of their inner life, and never become strong in prayer. If we desire to imitate Christ, to be responsive to the impulses of His love, to know His Sacred Heart, we shall be concerned more with the practices of humility and acts of obedience than with thoughts of any coveted place among a chosen few. Silence is often the accompaniment of profound humility. In its nothingness the soul sinks into silence, the silence of awe, of reverential love, in which it remains abashed in the presence of its Beloved. It is not the silence of the quietist; for the soul is wholly awake and alert—it gives and receives. Perhaps the most clear of all its perceptions at such a time, is that of the tender regard of God for the least that it does in the way of self-discipline and self-devotion for love of Him. He rewards the effort with grace unto the perfection desired and sought. That is His best gift. If other graces follow, they are of less value, though they may appear more peculiarly attractive.

In the court of prayer, as in "the Holy Place" of the Tabernacle of old, the silence is arresting through its very witness to the Divine presence. The creature must be silent before its Creator, only breaking forth in praise and worship, as do the Angels, when love lifts the soul through its silence to utter its longing. Then there is the deep silence of the spirit, for no act

of praise is without that unutterable sense which the soul acknowledges within the silence of its own being. It corresponds to the silence of that incommunicable love of the Divine Trinity in which God knows Himself. To what, then, are we not admitted when we enter the court of prayer? Could any degree of self-discipline and reverent carefulness be accounted too great? Here we perceive the truth of the soul's exaltation through sacrifice, the more spiritual, the more blessed in the ability to stand within the court of prayer; but the love so proved must penetrate the secrets of our spiritual nature, and unfold to the marvels of grace, in the stillness of the hidden sanctuary.

III

In all the appointments of the inner court of the Tabernacle gold predominated, suggesting both the high dignity of worship offered to God and also the love which inspires it. Within the sanctuary stood the golden candlestick with its seven lights, symbolic of unity and completeness. It was the symbol of the Holy Spirit,¹ Who in manifold ways must illumine and reveal. He is the Divine Teacher of prayer, the Guide of all who would contemplate the mysteries of God.² God is His Own Revealer. In His light we see light.³ The gift of spiritual sight is from Him. We contemplate Him in the power of His Own gift to us. But our understanding of God is allied to a true knowledge of ourselves; hence we are taught

¹ Cf. Rev. i. 4; iv. 5. ² Cf. S. John xvi. 13-15. ³ Ps. xxxvi. 9.

to look for His gift to ourselves, by which we are fitted and enabled for the high duty of knowing God. By the gold of our love He would have us support His seven gifts which, combining their lights, make perfect the glow of holy charity within the soul. With that pure Divine ray the court of prayer within the hidden sanctuary must be illuminated.

And with what unremitting care must this light be maintained! The fire upon the altar, divinely kindled, must never go out.¹ The lamps of sanctuary must burn continually.² And the priest within the sanctuary is responsible. God Himself will not extinguish either the fire of His love or the light of His Spirit; but we may so neglect them that they may die out. Our service within the hidden sanctuary consists primarily in caring for the sacred fire upon the altar and the holy oil of the lamps. Failure in either must be followed by spiritual loss and broken communion with God. If here the question arises: What of those times of interior darkness which we may occasionally experience? the answer is: We should examine ourselves upon our carefulness in keeping the proper lights of the sanctuary trimmed; upon our faithfulness to the Holy Spirit; upon our use of His gifts. Renewed devotion and care may restore light to the darkened soul. If after all our care the darkness continues, we may quietly repose in the will of God and await His action. Indeed, when a soul is subjected to His action and discipline, there is generally an interior peace, for there is love both in the visitation and in the acceptance of it.

¹ Lev. vi. 12, 13.

² Ex. xxvii. 20; Lev. xxiv. 2.

But as we take due care of the seven lamps, both separately and together, we shall be never wholly without light. Let us attend to the lamps in theological order. It will be necessary to the right understanding of these seven lamps to remember that they signify those gifts of the Spirit which are first of all to be contemplated in our Lord Himself as Man.¹ Their light within ourselves will be according to the degree of our likeness to Him in love. As the rays of the lamps continue to produce the perfect glow of Divine love within the soul, so must we employ each gift of the Spirit in the work of love, and particularly in the supreme concern of the soul: its communion with God. The gifts of the Spirit operate in ordinary prayer, and not immediately in mystic states. They are properly regarded as the lamps within the court of prayer.²

The first lamp is that of Holy Fear. This is not servile fear, "but rather a reverential fear of the Divine Majesty, before which the Angels prostrate themselves. This holy reverence the humanity of Christ owed to God."³ The prayers of Jesus made this evident. It is characteristic of the prayer of love. "It proceeds from the love of God, and is a certain perfection of that love. It is a fear of displeasing Him. It makes us apprehend and dread the punishment due to our offences less than the offences themselves." As the glow of this lamp of Holy Fear illumines the court of prayer we are conscious of an

¹ Cf. Is. xi. 2.

² See Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 97.

³ Devine, *A Manual of Ascetical Theology*, p. 247.

answering emotion within ourselves, a deep sense of the holiness and majesty of God. We love Him, and we long to correspond to this inward sense which both warns and impels us. Let us act simply and humbly, but confidently. This which we feel is the effect of Divine love within us; therefore we must respond with love; for love will make no mistake. If we are troubled by thoughts of self-love, fears of the world, or any of the vague apprehensions by which the sensitive soul is tormented, let us not give heed to them; but, on the contrary, encourage ourselves in love, showing our Lord by the purity of our intention the strength of our desire towards Him. We are not for the moment concerned with any further step in our prayer. We desire only to give to the uttermost that degree of love inspired by the gift of Holy Fear. That love will banish from the soul all those fears which so readily assail us, and make us stronger in the freedom of love.

This lamp of Holy Fear, burning with steady glow, lightens indeed the court of prayer, the beginning of that wondrous light which is the very glory of God within the hidden sanctuary; but more than this, it is to the soul the inception of that knowledge of God which is perfected in the gift of Wisdom. "*God is Light,*" and every lamp within the court of prayer is a beam of that supernal light, revealing God, and guiding the soul. In the light of Holy Fear let us contemplate the majesty and holiness of God, lest we presume through over-impulsiveness to reach beyond its light. Great reverence is required of those who minister in this court—a deep sense of what is due to

the most High God Whom we serve. Indeed, we shall never cease to need the light of this lamp. We shall often prove that in the way of love it is indispensable. Love is the most reverent of virtues, because it is greatest of all. Holy Fear is essentially love.

The second lamp is Piety or Godliness. As seen in our Lord, it reveals to us the interior direction of His love towards the Divine Unity, and the exterior direction of His love towards mankind in His life and death, and in the Holy Eucharist.¹ In ourselves it works in the same twofold way, directing us in love to the highest in God, and moving us by the same love towards our fellow-men. Thus godliness is the realization within the soul of that love which S. John praises—the love of God and our neighbour in perfect harmony.² The light of this lamp is not clear when we fail to preserve the right proportions of Divine charity. The pureness of prayer is sullied. But when we can contemplate the Blessed Trinity with consciousness of the love of each Divine Person separately, and in union; when, moreover, our love of the brethren is the outward expression of that which we inwardly hold; then is our prayer a generous following of the light which directs us to the very Heart of God.

The rays from this lamp are beautiful and gladdening; and while they illuminate the soul there can be no depression in prayer. Such, we feel, were the prayers of Jesus. He embraced the whole will of the Father. His love went wholly forth to the Father.

¹ See Ullathorne, *Christian Piety*, Lect. ix.

² 1 S. John iv. 11-21.

He was one with the Father in love and will. All His love for us passed at once into His love for the Father. If we are one with Him in the love of His Sacred Heart, we enter with Him into that abounding love of the Father, and know the joy of true godliness. Our prayer is the expression of all that we most deeply realize, of the joy of our souls in God in love. It is expressed to Him, while as an inspiration it affects all conduct, and touches with its peculiar sweetness our attitude towards all about us.

The third lamp is that of Knowledge. The light of this lamp is very pure, and marvellously penetrating. It enables us to discern between what is true and what is false in matters of doctrine, and indeed in all branches of learning, both sacred and secular; it is by its light we pursue our way, learning at each step as the fulness of life is understood. It is by the light of this lamp the Saints have discovered the secrets of that learning which is comprised in the knowledge of souls. All experience of the spiritual life is to be examined in that light. We must do this for ourselves as far as we are able, and with the help of those better skilled than ourselves in spiritual science. Our purpose should be to know God. No degree of knowledge is really worth our seeking if it does not advance our knowledge of Him. And it is pre-eminently by His Own gift that we know Him. "That learning is much more noble and much more worthy that cometh by the influence and gracious gifts of God than that which is gotten by the labour and study of man."¹ Above all, through faithful use

¹ *Imitation*, Bk. III. chap. xxxi.

of our knowledge of God, we should know the truth about ourselves, and how to profit by our spiritual experience. There is never need for morbid introspection; but there is need for healthy examination of the developing experience of the soul. And this may be neglected to our great loss. "I wot not," says the writer of the *Imitation*, "how it is, by what spirit we be led, nor what we pretend, we that be called spiritual persons, that we take greater labour and study for transitory things than we do to know the inward state of our own soul."¹ His words are true to-day. By all means let us seek to know ourselves, healthily and honestly. Our spiritual reading may help us in the way of this knowledge of the interior life. The advantage of such reading will not appear when it is indulged only as a religious recreation. The writings of the Saints are the fruits of spiritual experience of a high order. The knowledge they impart to the earnest mind is profound. They assist the soul by enabling it to see itself. They present a mirror which reflects its real self. If we use them with the aid of the lamp of Divine knowledge we shall learn—and be humble.

The light of each several lamp in the court of prayer is given for the assistance of the soul in its high function of prayer. As we contemplate them separately, we are shown a wideness of view, an expansiveness of spiritual realization, which enlarges our conception of prayer. We perceive it to be an occupation of the soul wherein it lives and moves after the manner of sonship; for the child of God is

¹ *Imitation*, Bk. III. chap. xxxi.

concerned with the things of his Father. The lamp of Knowledge is therefore in its use most beautiful. The knowledge of ourselves is most closely associated with the knowledge of God. As both are increased, we are able to pray with clearer understanding. We look into depths of life and light; and although the vision be somewhat confused, we know it is because the light of Divine knowledge is not as yet perfect within ourselves. We need the full light of all the sacred lamps to enable us to gaze unhindered upon the vision of Divine life. That is, only as the soul is enriched with the gifts of the Holy Ghost in perfection can it correspond in prayer to its predestined life.

Very patiently and lovingly must we persevere in the light of this lamp; and not imagine that we can pray without knowledge. But because it is the gift of the Holy Ghost, we shall not fail for lack of knowledge if we lovingly depend upon Him. Knowledge is never wanting in one who loves; for love itself is knowledge of a highly spiritual kind. It would be true to say that love is reinforced by all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, because in itself there exists the elements of each. The gift of knowledge amplifies the intelligence of love, and makes it very effective in ways of prayer. Therefore we say again, the loving soul will not fail of the light of knowledge. Love is the first essential to the soul's life, as it is the elemental principle of the Divine life. "*God is love*"; and the unloving soul cannot know Him.

The fourth lamp is that of Strength—might, fortitude, After the three lamps already considered,

this shines forth with peculiar encouragement. In the course of the spiritual life there will be occasions when this gift of the Holy Ghost will appear the most needful of all. We need strength in days of hard fighting, when some high achievement is all but frustrated, when the opposition of enemies is hard to break down; and again we need it when we can only stand in our appointed places, not yet victors, though, certainly, not vanquished. It is the soul strong in this gift that awaits the enemy, if he cannot for the moment pursue him. It is the valiant soul who can defy the weariness of conflict and not fail in the day of pain.

But in prayer we need this strength. They are greatly mistaken who suppose the life of prayer to be easy. The great contemplative Saints have felt the need of this strength as much in prayer as in the hard conditions of labour, or persecution, or even martyrdom. At the very time we begin to rejoice in the spiritual prospect which allures the loving soul to prayer, we are arrested by unsuspected difficulties which call for exertion. Are we strong enough? Many a soul is discouraged, daunted, turned back. There is no sufficient reason for this. It is the testing of their purpose, it is the trial of love. They may turn back, thinking, though vainly, to content themselves with a lower standard of perfection; but in so doing they forfeit the crown and glory of sanctity which would have been peculiarly their own. They *have* the gift of strength, if they have those other gifts by which they have advanced so far. Their love is equal to the trial if they will but cease to

contemplate their own weakness. "*My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"¹ The Divine strength is realized within the soul when there is both a true sense of direction in life and the will to attain. "*Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.*"²

As one of the lamps within the court of prayer, this lamp of Strength glows with level rays. Following its light we can never be long held by the fears which lie hidden within the shadows of our spiritual pathway, nor by the grim threatenings of the prince of darkness. The soul perceives the end of its purpose, because it is strong. And God, seeing its strength, encourages to victory.³ In the secret of His communication there is conveyed to the soul an assurance of love, very secret and clear. Prayer is very pure as it springs from the sense of this Heavenly benediction; while the spiritual gain to the soul itself is beyond estimation. The strong soul perceives the high certitude of love, and, following the example of her Beloved, gives herself to no lower thought, and aspires to no lesser height.

If we could always know at the time of our great interior conflicts how great is the prize to be won, we should endure with greater constancy; but so much is hidden at the moment, and only the light proceeding from the gift of strength remains, bright enough to reveal the way, but leaving much to the generous devotion of the soul itself. We must be brave and valiant for love alone, seeking no other reward; for the vindication of Divine love is that

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

² Prov. iv. 25.

³ Cf. Judges vi. 14.

which makes the Saint a sharer in the glory of the Beloved. But if we know the generosity of the Sacred Heart we shall not be weak. The desire of the soul will be to show a like love to the fulness of its power.

The fifth lamp is that of Counsel. "The gift of counsel is a light of the Holy Spirit which teaches us how to act amid the difficulties of life, to avoid its dangers, and to carry out wisely all plans which may concern our salvation or the glory of God."¹ Thus simply may we define the use of this gift. Placed after that of strength, we quickly discover that only as we are strong in spirit can we embrace the secret counsels of God, and respond to the love which calls us to activities of soul which because of their hiddenness require so great courage on our part. Very beautiful is the glow of this lamp; but it must be contemplated and followed with great humility. There are false lights which dazzle the proud soul. Pride lacks discernment. Humility is not deceived. If humbly we ponder the secret motions of the Holy Ghost within us, we shall experience a certain attraction towards the essentials of holiness, or to that perfection which lies at the heart of our vocation, or to something we understand to be the particular requirement of Divine love in our own case. The Holy Ghost, revealing to us the riches of the Heart of the Beloved, shows also the proper action of the soul on whom He would bestow His treasures of love. There can be no doubt in any case where the attraction is strong and the way of love clearly defined.

¹ Landriot, *Conferences on the Holy Spirit*, p. 97.

It may be that only in some hidden way can we follow the light of Divine counsel. To declare it openly might suggest the prompting of self-conceit. In the hidden sanctuary, in the court of prayer, this light shines for our interior use and direction. The way of obedience is not less clear to the loving soul because it must be followed in secret. But it is often as difficult as it is plain; for it is harder to persevere in secret than in more public ways, where, if there be some criticism, there is usually also some approval of our way of life.

Doubts may arise from consideration of the self, or the conditions of ordinary life; but if we yield to them, we quickly perceive how thoroughly opposed they are to our spiritual advance. The light of Counsel is clouded and uncertain, and if we do not desist from the mental discussion of the doubts, and follow in simplicity the light as God gives it, we shall lose our way hopelessly.

The light being given, it is to guide us immediately in prayer. There is no plan, or purpose, or design in the spiritual life which is not perfected in prayer; for all that concerns our sanctification is ordered according to the eternal purpose of God towards us and our place in His Kingdom. Assisted by the light from this lamp of Counsel, we contemplate the working of His love, as personal to the individual, and as all-embracing to the world. In contemplation of that love the soul is amazed at the dignity of its vocation. It is so glorious, so far beyond anything we could imagine of ourselves. It is independent of time, and entirely spiritual. It can be fulfilled only in God

and in the activities of His love. It is only in union with Him that our half-realized powers and fleeting intuitions of Divine and eternal things will be found in essential harmony. Some dim perception of it moves us to wonder and adoration as we pray, to be followed, perhaps, by deep regret or deeper contrition, as we realize how imperfect has been our life's response to so great a love. The tenderness of the Holy Ghost, manifested towards us in the gift of counsel, consoles us. It is by His gift we are kept in the consciousness both of God's purpose and also of our own power to correspond to that purpose. The light of His gift, while guiding the soul in interior ways, illumines also the way of its progress, revealing the wide fields of spiritual action. But the direction is always the same, and we can only cry: "*O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacle.*"¹

Oh, that we were always strong to bear the light of Divine counsel, and always patient in following it! We follow it best when in prayer we are wholly given to that which it reveals; that is, when we seek to be identified with the very activities of Divine love discovered to us. There is so much that can be accomplished only in the hiddenness of our union with God; and the light that will guide us is that of His counsel. And the soul that is strong in love will discern the light of love.

The sixth lamp is that of Understanding. As we regard the gifts of the Holy Ghost in their ascending order, we perceive how they are given to raise the

¹ Pa. xliii. 3.

soul to the perfection of life in God. The measure, or richness, of each gift is always affected by the use we make of the others. So also as lamps within the court of prayer, the light of each appears as in some degree affected by the glow of the other lamps. That is, only as we follow the lights according to their proper use are we prepared for that which will guide us towards the highest knowledge of God. It is a gift above that of reason. Its light burns with attractive clearness in the soul of a Saint; for he is guided by what he understands through this gift of the Holy Ghost, rather than by appeals to reason. And we cannot say his way is not good. Understanding is a higher gift than counsel, and as a light is even more interior. The gift of understanding "gives the soul the heavenly faculty of seeing Divine truth without reasoning about it, and of admitting it without needing proofs, as in the natural order we treat fundamental truths." ¹

This lamp gives its purest light in simple souls. In the heart of a child, or of a child-like Saint, sophistry has no place; they perceive truth by the Divine light within them, and soar beyond the conclusions of the learned. Our Lord promised His Apostles the sureness of this light, and it was afterwards most evident in them.² They were men who understood. Their understanding was something more than a clear apprehension of truth, it was the understanding of the Heart of their Lord through love. As love between individuals results in mutual understanding, so be-

¹ Landriot, *Conferences on the Holy Spirit*, p. 108.

² Cf. S. Matt. x. 19, 20.

tween the soul and the Beloved there is the same realization of love according to its degree of perfection. The outward life also is affected. Our Lord said of Himself: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for what things soever He doeth, them also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth.*"¹ This refers, of course, to the absolute relation of the Divine Persons; but it helps us to understand the consequences of our own life in Christ. We are "brought nigh" by Him. The privileges of sonship are ours. As the very children of God we may know the mind of our Father. The gift and light of understanding enable us both to know His purpose and also to regulate our conduct consistently with it.

But behind all this is our prayer. In the light of this lamp of Understanding it becomes more and more the simple exercise of love. Love is pre-eminently the virtue which promotes understanding, because it is the unifying virtue. As love grows, as we are able to rest in the reality of it as the foundation fact of our spiritual life, so our prayer merges into that understanding which is the property of love between the Lover and the loved. At times the light is clear and bright; at others soft and subdued. And, yet again, it may be for a time so obscured that we find it only within the will. But so long as the will has power to act it is never without a ray of understanding. Hence the choice of the will may always be a right one. This lamp is never extinguished in the court of

¹ S. John v. 19, 20, see Westcott, *Gospel of S. John*, p. 85.

prayer. If we could imagine that any one of the lamps could be extinguished, we should destroy the mystic sufficiency of the light divinely given. Any obscuration is to be traced within ourselves, and not to any defect or incompleteness in the provision which God has made for us. Let us not forget that we enter the hidden sanctuary, not as already perfect in spirit, but needing much, and ignorant of much, that is very necessary to our perfection. And in the court of prayer there is very much to be learned. The occasional paling of the lamp of Understanding may be explained by our own consciousness of secret imperfections; but they will be remedied as we continue faithful, not leaving the court of prayer, but abiding therein, because *our Lord* has brought us within its portal. We must be faithful to Him.

As the shadows clear away from the soul, and the lamp of Understanding is found once more to be glowing with untroubled ray, there is always a happier realization of the whole revelation of love in God. Love is everything in Him; everything is love in Him. We understand life, whether we look outwardly to the world or inwardly to the depths and heights revealed to us; but it is love that explains, making everything glad in its own joy. There we can pray, but not with words so much as through the simple act of loving. In the light of this lamp there is the attraction of love, rather than the insistence of needs, and we cannot but yield. It is the Beloved Who draws the soul to Himself within the light. Ours should be the response of understanding love, the pure act by which we will the whole purpose of His love,

because He makes us one with Himself in its power and joy. There is granted an intuition of sublime perfection not far removed. But for that is needed the remaining lamp, the light of which we are prepared to follow.

The seventh and last lamp is that of Wisdom. "The gift of Divine wisdom is a certain created participation of the Holy Spirit, as He is the Eternal Wisdom. That Eternal Wisdom is the infinite love of the Father and the Son in the Person of the Holy Ghost. In the word of S. Bonaventure: 'The wisdom that descends to us from above is the splendour of the truth in the delightful sense of good. Having God for its chief object, as He is the true good that attracts our will to Him, it draws us to love God and to delight in Him. Wherefore,' concludes the great Doctor and Saint, 'the gift of wisdom is a supernatural habit infused into the soul by the Holy Spirit, enabling us to know, to love, and to delight in God.'"¹

Being thus the very light of the Divine love, the lamp of Wisdom unites the rays of all the lamps within the court of prayer. Love has its place in every gift of the Holy Ghost, and makes perfect the light of the several lamps; but in this seventh lamp we contemplate the pure wisdom of God, that is, the light of His essential love. Where it prevails there is great joy and peace in the things of God; there is the possession of eternal good in the glory of heavenly light above the dark and vexing conditions of the world. There is increasing delight in God, for this Divine wisdom is the illuminating gift to those who are in

¹ Ullathorne, *Christian Patience*, Lect. ix.

the way of union. Hence it is pre-eminently the gift of the Saints. No words could describe the pureness and beauty of this light; for no one could ever declare the secret knowledge of the love of God, or that wholly interior experience of it which He vouchsafes to His true lovers. It is, in the language of the Saints, secret, that is, incommunicable; not merely hidden, but passing expression. But what they cannot well express in words is revealed more strikingly, though unconsciously, in the beauty of their souls. According to S. Bernard ¹ this spiritual beauty, whether in men or Angels, consists in the possession of the Divine gift of wisdom. All knowledge of souls confirms this assertion of the Saints; for the beauty is to be observed in those who in prayer have both attained to, and followed, that light of Divine Wisdom. "*In Thy light shall we see light,*" ² that is, by this lamp of Wisdom we are directed to the contemplation of God Who is light.³

The lamp of Wisdom serves this high purpose in the court of prayer. It shines down into the soul, awakening its latent powers of spiritual vision, gladdening the whole being with the immanence of that for which we were created. There is joy in all self-realization of spirit; for then we feel our affinity to eternal things. The child of God knows that in the kingdom of his Father he finds his own. The joy of the experience is lofty and unearthly; the peace is profound and heavenly. But all this is but the accompaniment of the power of vision. The lamp of Wisdom discloses

¹ Sermon lxxiv. 10. Cf. Eccl. viii. 1.

² Ps. xxxvi. 9.

³ 1 S. John i. 5.

the secret ways of Divine love. “ *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*”¹ It is the Spirit’s highest gift and most beneficent beam. It reveals God in His tender love delighting to share with His Own the joyous ways of His love, and to give them encouragement in the contemplation of the mysteries of life.

If at one touch of experience, at one glad moment of perfection, we are thrilled by the Divine nearness, there is yet a tranquillizing effect of the love we feel; for in this light of Divine wisdom all things that contribute to the knowledge of the glory of God are seen in harmonious relation to each other. All are beheld in simple beauty of light. And all are ours in the Beloved, Who is Himself the Word and Wisdom of the Father. All that we behold are our own through Him. He brings them to us; and as we realize our place in His love, His Heart, there is only the glad sense of the peace which He gives. Having Him we have all things. He is the brightness of that eternal glory which has come to us. Well does S. John of the Cross cry to Him in excess of love: “ By reason of Thy pureness, O Divine Wisdom, many things are known in Thee in one, for Thou art the treasury of the everlasting Father, the brightness of eternal light, the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of His goodness.”²

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9-10.

² *The Living Flame of Love*, stanza iii. 19. Cf. *Wisdom* vii. 26.

The light of the seven lamps is a perfect light, it is the light of God within the soul, which else were dark and confused as to its powers; for there is no darkness equal to that which pervades the soul that is without God; as also there is no light so subtle, or so penetrating, as that of the Holy Spirit imparted to the soul. But these several lamps are perceived to be certain properties of love. The lamps within the sanctuary were held aloft by a golden standard—"the candlestick." Similarly within the court of prayer these lamps are supported upon love. There is not one that is not in its brilliance an effulgence of love. The Holy Ghost, Himself the very Spirit of Love, filling the soul, makes it rich in love, and all His gifts combine in the perfection of love.

The gifts of the Holy Ghost are given together, and are immediately seen as effectual gifts within the loving soul; but there is also a development of the gifts, and consequently of the light proceeding from them, from the least to the greatest, as the soul advances in the way of perfection. In prayer we advance in love, and therefore the lamps attain to their proper brilliance. From the light of holy fear to that of holy wisdom there is a steady increase of love. Wisdom, as we have understood it, implies a high degree of love. Yet is there no neglect of the other gifts, or lamps, for the more loving the soul, the more careful is it of those things which secure the freedom and right expression of love. Fear, godliness, knowledge, might, counsel and understanding are each in their degree necessary to the perfection of the light of wisdom, as it again sheds the pure glory of its light, not

only over all the others, but in a subtle manner through them. If the light of wisdom were not given, there would be imperfection, not only in the light of the lamps in their unity, but also in their several rays. Love would be deprived of its vision, and prayer would lose its attraction. The court we enter with so much expectation would be disappointing, and empty of that which promised the satisfaction of love—the way to union with God.

But, thanks be to God, the lights of the court of prayer are clear. We are left in no doubt. Their soft rays rest upon us as we use all other helps in their order and place. The promise of the vision, the reward of faithful love, the fruit of our prayer, is assured. To the faithful in this court of prayer be it said: “*The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.*”¹ Let us rest in His light, and go on to more earnest practice of prayer, as one by one the lamps shine upon some hidden token of our necessity and God’s infinite goodness. Let us look onward as the light reveals the path of eternal glory, and we shall be reminded of the “*seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne.*”² The earthly appointments are after the patterns of the heavenly. If on earth we are guided by the illumination of the Holy Ghost in the higher ways of prayer and worship, it is that we may pass in due time and order to that worship of Heaven which, for all the glory of life and love in the Saints themselves, will yet be offered in the power of the Holy Ghost. Most reverently and lovingly shall we rejoice in His light now as we realize the oneness of

¹ 1 S. Peter iv. 14.

² Rev. iv. 5.

our spiritual life through all its growth. Through the Divine gifts we may discern very much of that which hereafter will be our eternal joy—a joy increased as we remember the long spiritual struggle which has ended in the fruition of all that here was dimly perceived.

IV

The light within the court of prayer is the mystical illumination of the Spirit. We delight in it. We share the sentiment of the Apostles, who desired to linger in the light of their Lord's transfiguration: "*it is good for us to be here.*"¹ It is indeed "*good,*" and we may truly abide within the light; but not without remembrance of those external conditions without which we cannot live rightly. The more perfect our union with the Beloved, the more shall we resemble Him in that perfect blending of all the elements of life, exterior and interior, which made His love so simply human, while it was so essentially Divine. If we do service to God in the court of prayer, the conditions proper to our normal existence as men and women, the gifts by which our lives are supported or enriched, should contribute to the devotion which is our chief delight. Our life of prayer should be all-embracing, not unilateral. This is not realized by all who are much given to prayer; but it is the Divine ideal for us, as we may learn from those Saints who have been the great exponents of the life of prayer.

¹ St. Matt. xvii. 4.

Their boundless joy in nature, their happiness in all the gifts of God, their human fellowship, were elements of that sublime consciousness of the Divine love which made their prayer so wonderful. Seeing God in everything, and in every soul, they worshipped with that enlarged sense of love which never declined towards distraction. They were not less readily absorbed in God because they maintained the wideness of holy charity. This is surely His way for us.

Even in the Tabernacle there was the table of shew-bread. The table, overlaid and adorned with gold, was distinguished among the holy things. The loaves, set in order, were yet further identified with the mystic service of prayer by the solemn imposition of incense. "*And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the Lord. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord.*"¹ This ceremony was repeated every Sabbath. What is the teaching of all this? There is a linking of the memorial with the prayer and the Altar of Incense. Does not the soul need to renew continually its memorial of the gifts of God, and that by prayer? Does not this apply to the consecration of the necessities of life? Then they are to the faithful soul no longer common or mean, be they never so poor; but rather worthy to be taken into the service of the sanctuary. At least they will be remembered. Love will hold them in thankfulness. The soul's possession

¹ Lev. xxiv. 5-7.

of them will be in some sort a mystical memorial of them within the court of prayer.

The renewal of the shew-bread seems to imply that while, on the one hand, the memorial avails to spiritual ends, and then is superseded, on the other, there is a re-enrichment of devotion as the memorial is renewed. So the consecration of material gifts and things pertaining to the outer life is allied to the inward illumination of the Holy Ghost, and together these all find their purpose in the offering of prayer.

It is surely in this spirit the Saints have always shown their reverence for the gifts of God in the use they have made of simple necessities. Their poverty hindered not their thankfulness. And perhaps because of their loving regard, their devotion was attested by such Divine interpositions as those received in the life of S. Clare,¹ or in the life of Abbot Stephen.² If a like spirit be in us we shall not fail of its effectual inspiration in prayer. God's gifts are precious in His sight; let them be precious in ours. But loving thankfulness for the bounty of God, and reverent estimation of His gifts, are always most marked in those who have embraced an ascetical life. Self-indulgence destroys both the one and the other. Luxury and repletion are opposed to the spirit of prayer. If our first thought be for the necessities of our prayer, there will be no misuse of those things which God has provided as requisite to the material life. Thus in this very court of prayer itself we are

¹ *Life and Legend of the Lady S. Clare*, pp. 57, 125.

² Newman's *Lives of the English Saints*, Vol. I., "S. Stephen, Abbot," chap. xi.

warned of dangers, and taught to consecrate all things to God, that they may not become a hindrance to devotion. "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*"¹

V

Thus far all that we have found in the court of prayer has seemed only preparatory to the prayer itself. The lamps of the Spirit, and the symbolic memorial of the gifts of God, by which He sustains the natural life, are realized aids to the soul in its effort to pray and hold communion with God in love. And as we pray, as the whole purpose of our entrance within the court of prayer is accomplished, we shall need more and more the pure light of the Holy Ghost, while our hold upon the natural life is mortified, and simple, and sanctified. We have entered the court of prayer from the court of sacrifice, moved by the love which through self-oblation has risen to the desire for that closer communion which in the silence and seclusion of this court has been ever the solace of the Saints. But if we have passed through the court of sacrifice, we must, as we have seen, do so again and again, renewing the order of our priestly service, and advancing with renewed consecration to the high duty of prayer. Again, we shall prove, as the demands of the way of prayer are understood, how we must deal with *ourselves*; and that will compel us to renewed self-oblation. Prayer must be the occupation of a soul practising interiorly the ascetical life. That is,

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

the soul that will pray well must be always under training; for there are sufferings and conflicts which will spoil our prayer only if we are not trained to meet them. There is no aspect of interior combat that will not result in some gain to our prayer when by love the soul has conquered. We shall know this by experience as we proceed.

In the sanctuary of old there stood the Altar of Incense; the centre of a striking daily ritual. "After the lamb had been slain the incensing priest and his assistants approached the great brazen altar of burnt offering in the court of the priests. One assistant filled a golden censer with incense, and another put burning coals from the altar of burnt-offering into a golden bowl. The priest and his assistants then passed into the Holy Place, and as they passed from one court to the other struck an instrument which called the Priests and Levites to take their places. In the Holy Place the coals were spread on the golden altar of incense, and the incense was arranged. The assistant priests then retired, leaving the incensing priest alone, who waited for the signal announcing that the multitude in the outer court had bent in prayer with outstretched hands, when he immediately set the incense on fire, causing the Holy Place to be filled with smoke." ¹

Sacrifice was thus set forth as the true preparation for prayer. The incense, moreover, was consumed by fire from the altar of burnt-offering, which, having been divinely given, was not allowed to go out. Spiritually the same fire of Divine love impels the soul alike

¹ *Five Visions of the Revelation*, p. 21.

to sacrifice and prayer. Hence we are led once more to the thought of sacrifice preceding prayer. They will pray best whose first care is the renewal of their self-oblation. They will pass to the court of prayer bearing the live coal and the prepared incense. The incense, whether offered in the earthly or the heavenly court, is symbolic of prayer. The smoke and perfume diffused throughout the court made the very atmosphere holy. It is no less sanctifying in its effect within the hidden sanctuary, where we meet God with the worship of the heart; and from the inner life it is diffused throughout the outer and visible life. This is that overflowing to the senses of that which first fills the soul, which is so often to be observed in the Saints—that air of holiness which makes their presence suggestive of the sanctuary.

In the perfume of incense there is a mingling of odours; for incense is made by blending together selected aromatic ingredients. As prescribed by Moses they included even a bitter substance.¹ It might not be prepared, or imitated, for any private use. There must be no lowering of that which is peculiar to the sanctuary by any unhallowed association. The pure essentials of prayer must be kept apart from secular uses. The perfume of the spiritual life cannot be destroyed; but the operation of the Divine fire of love upon the incense itself is not open to observation. And what is the composition of the incense, regarded spiritually? Graces and virtues combine and intermingle within the soul, and the fragrance of prayer is given forth according to their

¹ Ex. xxx. 34-38.

perfection, through the operation of the sacred fire of love. The virtues of the soul are compared to spices. "*Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?*"¹ Mystically this represents a soul in prayer. The wilderness may refer to some season of aridity and spiritual discipline out of which the soul has come renewed in graces and virtues which have been refined and tested. The prayer of such an one is always peculiarly redolent of Divine sweetness, which is inherent in every virtue; but which, by reason of suffering and spiritual exercise, has been renewed in the prayer of love and self-oblation. *Myrrh and frankincense* "have been understood to denote respectively mortification of the flesh and purity of prayer."² There are "*all the powders of the merchant,*" and these signify the virtues generally. There is, perhaps, an underlying thought of contrition, which is concerned with all that is contrary to virtue, and is itself a movement of love. Under its action the virtues, with all their sweetness, are diffused with freshness over the whole life, and so are taken up into our prayer, to give forth their odours within the hidden sanctuary.

"In mine own conscience then, as in a mortar,
I'll place mine heart, and bray it there;
If grief for what is past, and fear
Of what's to come, be a sufficient torture,
I'll break it all
In pieces small:
Sin shall not find a sherd without a flaw
Wherein to lodge one lust against Thy law."³

¹ Cant. iii. 6.

² See Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 125.

³ *Ibid.*

We do not always value aright our trials of flesh and spirit in relation to our prayer. We never pray so fervently as when, under some discipline, or suffering, or necessity, we are exercised in the virtues. A little reflection will confirm the truth of this. Are not our seasons of trial, when we have striven for self-conquest, self-surrender, self-determination, in the way of love, and have attained through grace to freedom of spirit, always followed by joy in our prayer? And of what nature is the joy? It is not merely that of having gained what we desired, the goal of our aspirations; but the joy of being able to express ourselves more lovingly to God, and with full consciousness of His gifts, which abound within us with Divine preciousness. All that delight which springs forth from the virtues, exhilarating the soul, reaches its fulness when it is used as an incentive to prayer. Great souls will fear when there is nothing in their experience to spur them on in the exercise of virtue; for they suspect some spiritual defection within themselves. There is no love of spiritual ease in the heart of the Saint. And if we would offer aright the incense of prayer, we too shall welcome the means which the Holy Spirit employs to quicken our souls.

And yet it is not only through trial that we are led to the higher realities of prayer. If we use our seasons of gladness, prosperity, blessing, rightly, they also exalt the soul in prayer, and make the fragrance of the incense abound. But we are so ready to appropriate to our own enjoyment those brighter days, that there is always the fear that we shall rather

shorten our prayer, or become careless in it. If we have really advanced in the conquest of self-love, we shall see in every occasion of brightness and joy in our lives, whether interiorly of the soul, or exteriorly of our circumstances, only the means provided for more complete self-oblation. A season of gladness may be as severe a test of our love to God as any we may have to endure. And do we always give the proof of love which God desires? And if failing in that proof of love, can we know either the joy or sweetness of prayer? The delight we might experience in expressing ourselves lovingly to God remains unknown; while the yet more perfect joy which springs from the meeting of the human heart with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the knowledge we gain of His love to us, and the joy with which He receives us, is in no sense perceived. The incense is poor, and lacking in fragrance. The fire of love is dying down. The test has failed.

The Bride in the Canticles knew the value of the testing, and desired it. "*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*"¹ The soft air of prosperity, and the cold, rough wind of adversity, as they awaken different emotions within the soul, call forth corresponding expressions of love to God. If we truly love, we shall pray under all circumstances out of pure desire to show our love. How fragrant then is the incense pervading the court of prayer! Its subtlety is the more precious to God, Who knows exactly the soul's response to the operation of His

¹ Cant. iv. 16.

Spirit in every experience of its life. But it must be borne in mind that all that conduces to this perfection of the incense is hidden, and we must not spoil it by exposure. As the fire liberates the odours, so the love burning within the soul liberates all the latent elements of pure devotion, and from the varied experiences sends forth that which is sweet and fragrant. It is, again, confined within the court of prayer for God only. The pure sweetness which, even through its adversity, the soul may taste in prayer, is yet all for God. The moment it is appropriated by the self it loses its sweetness. It must be thus that we offer, not "*strange incense*,"¹ not that which is of the self, conserved or offered for selfish ends, but only for the pure worship of love.

God, Who commanded the preparation of the incense, and gave the fire which should liberate its odours, still directs the soul as to its mystical counterpart. He has given to each experience that affects our prayer its own essential secret which only love can set free; that is, the living flame which He first enkindles within the soul. That fire of love reascends to Him charged with the incense of our prayer. But it is not merely our prayer as an expression of our thoughts and desires that rises to God; the whole self is exalted. We are not detached from our prayer, for the hidden sanctuary is that of our own hearts, and the court of prayer the more interior part. Hence the exaltation of the soul in prayer. There is a certain identification of the soul with the Beloved through love in His life, which consisted in

¹ Ez. xxx. 9, 37.

prayer. If we apply to Him the words of the Psalmist, "*I am prayer*,"¹ it is easy to understand how the soul in union with Him shares that characteristic of His love. If the offering of the incense be never intermitted we approach this ideal, for the perfume remains within the sanctuary.

VI

Thus far we have considered only the Divine provision for the soul within the court of prayer, the aids appointed for every one who will be faithful to the high duties of spiritual priesthood. But faithful prayer becomes fruitful prayer. It is within this court that God is wont to bestow particular graces, and make known His will, and communicate the treasures of His love, as to the aged Zachariah, to whom the Archangel Gabriel was sent.² It is here, also, that we shall learn the secrets of the Sacred Heart of the Beloved, and know the love which passeth knowledge. Following the examples of the Saints, we shall seek to abide in this court, answering to the call for ever holier purity of being, until in His goodness He lead us to that pure, deep knowledge which is the reward of love.³ By the light of the Holy Ghost we perceive the truth about ourselves, which is the next step to some more wonderful truth in God; and every lamp by which He guides us glows with the brightness of that which awaits our seeing.

¹ Ps. cix. 4, where the phrase is literally, "I am prayer."

² S. Luke i. 11.

³ Cf. *Imitation*, the whole of Book III.

The memorial of temporal gifts reminds us of the super-essential food of the Divine Word. The Altar of incense keeps us mindful of the unceasing work of love, the constant aspiration of the soul. But continuous response to God in these ways, and by these means, makes plain the need of many an interior act of discipline and self-subdual, which will be in themselves acts of love; for, loving that which we perceive in God, we shall lovingly dispose ourselves for its attainment. The truest work of love on our part will be the perfecting of our souls in that inward purity without which there can be no real progress in the higher ways of prayer.

We are in danger when we neglect this interior disposition. Self-love has hidden roots. We may even with self-confidence assume our own fitness for God's Divine communications, and that without suspecting the reason for His withdrawal, and the unprofitableness of our prayer when we have left it with only a feeling of disappointment and loss. But any withholding on His part is in love to the soul, as we prove the moment we perceive our fault and seek to correct it. He is ever ready in love; but our self-love excludes Him even when we desire Him. When we renounce our pride, and repudiate the false claims to any merit in our prayer, we find only the encompassing of a great love, infinitely tender and reassuring. We feel this with a deep sense of its reality; but we dare not presume. We have found one blessing in humility; we shall find another in patience. We contemplate, indeed, that which is real; but our sense of it is confused. The glory of Divine love is

too strong even for our recovered spiritual sight. We must not think to ascend all at once to the highest rays; but rather, preserving our humility, wait upon our Divine Lord as unworthy even of so much. It is not ours to take. It is His to give. And He will give when He finds only love and a pure desire for Himself. If we have any such feeling in our hearts, let us express it in simplest love. "Spread Thou my heart into Thy love, that I may taste and feel how sweet it is to serve Thee, and how joyful it is to laud Thee, and to be as I were all molten into Thy love. O I am bounden in love, and go far above myself, for the wonderful great fervour that I feel of Thy unspeakable goodness! I shall sing to Thee the song of love, and I shall follow Thee, my Beloved, by highness of thought, wheresoever Thou go; and my soul shall never be weary to praise Thee with the joyful song of ghostly love that I shall sing to Thee." ¹

To follow the Beloved with "high thought" is to receive His thought, and to follow it with adoring love, or simply to retain it in joyful contemplation of the truth it contains. This is far removed from speculation and vain searching after hidden mysteries. We never lose ourselves in the thoughts which God gives. They are never isolated, never precarious; but rather they come to us with a fulness of revelation that contents us, while inspiring us with hopes so sure that already we seem to be in possession of the riches of His love. It is not that we have them in their fulness; but the vistas of love's glory extending to our view are the continuation of that wherein we

¹ *Imitation*, Book III. chap. v.

stand. We possess the infinite. We have spiritual life. But in our prayer the vastness of all this is contained within the simplicity of the love which holds us at the moment. Thus tenderly does the Beloved approach us in the might of His love. But being love, eternal and Divine, it is that into which our own love passes, as a tiny rivulet into the ocean, to become one with it. Or we may change the simile and say the soul by means of its love feels more its capacity to absorb the Divine love which inundates it. The spiritual persons have alluded to their own experience of this, comparing the soul to a sponge which quickly absorbs the water into which it is plunged. And yet another has expressed his sense of this same truth :

“I am an emptiness for Thee to fill,
My soul a cavern for Thy sea.”¹

These are experiences of the operations of Divine love in souls with capacity for it; that is the desire for it, and the will to co-operate with it.

But love is no impersonal force, and it is with no vague consciousness that we aspire to be filled with love. Just because it is love, both in our desire and in that also which we seek, we find it in the simple fact of love which unites us to our Lord. The more truly we are His by our own act of self-surrender in love, the more does He declare Himself to our hearts as Self-given to us. This becomes so intimate a truth of love within ourselves that we may say with the Bride : “ *My Beloved is mine and I am His.*”² This

¹ George Macdonald.

² Cant. ii. 16.

is the word of one who goes out from himself, humble in very nothingness, to be wholly given to his Lord, Who in His love makes no reserves. Do we so love? In this court of prayer we should concentrate much on the Person of our Beloved; and see that we wander not aimlessly in the contemplation of love, and so miss the chiefest of all the joys of interior life—the joy of union with Him.

While we find our sanctuary in His Sacred Heart, and within the court of prayer know the encompassing of His love, He is yet Himself before us, standing forth in the full beauty and strength of majestic love. Let us, as we are able, behold and adore Him in this beauty. We cannot behold it in every detail of His infinite perfections; but according to our strength it will be given us to recognize Him as our Beloved. His desire is towards the soul that seeks Him, and He will reveal Himself in the homely manner so extolled by the Saints. How have we even attained to this—that we may recognize His beauty, and be won by His graciousness, and be held captive by His love? Through all the helps given in this very court of prayer we have been prepared for the recognition of the Beloved. Here we have learned, and have been trained in the very faculty for knowing, and loving, and owning allegiance to Him, the King Beloved. Scarcely can we trace the steps of interior education in the way of prayer; but in some way they are associated with times of direct knowledge of Him. We wait upon Him, and in His presence learn deep truths about ourselves and about Him. Our service and worship is intelligent. Our prayer embraces

all experience of love, light, and learning; for these all tend towards our spiritual enlargement.¹ Our very exercise of soul in the way of learning may be worship, and worship learning. One joy is in both.

Union with God is the ultimate purpose of prayer; for prayer is the whole utterance and expression of love, which is the effectual means of union. All our occupation within the court of prayer consists in the right expression of love, which is being informed, directed and developed towards its consummation. The Divine Lover is Himself the Guide, as He is the end of that we seek. There is nothing of all we may find within the court of prayer that does not assist to that end. And there is yet much more awaiting us.

VII

In the court of prayer we meet our Lord Beloved, Who comes to us for the very purpose of being known by us. Do we know Him? S. Paul could say, "*I know Whom I have believed;*"² and his was the knowledge of proved love. S. John knew Him in an intimacy not permitted to others; and all his writings bear witness to that intimacy. And these two Saints, so unreasonably separated in popular estimation, are yet most closely united in their knowledge of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is this same knowledge which is imparted to the soul in prayer. But the love of the Sacred Heart can never be exhausted, never fully known—it "*passeth knowledge.*" Yet we

¹ Ps. cxix. 32.

² 2 Tim. i. 12.

may know it, and be always growing unto a more perfect knowledge as we recognize under all circumstances and conditions His desire to be known. In every meeting with the Beloved there may be perceived some distinctive manifestation of the love of His Heart towards us. If we but welcome this truth, it will matter little what is the experience of the hour: it is glorified by His love. Much of our rebellion against difficulty and pain arises from our non-recognition of the attraction of love in everything. If we but met the hard things of life with the will to love, we should find Him revealed to us in some most winning expression of love. We should know the Heart of the Beloved; and that is ever the joy of the lover. And for such rapture of intuition everything is worth while that suffering nature may do or bear.

We even think of our Lord, in the tremendous insistence of His love, leading the beloved soul into the very paths which lead through pain and grief, because of the tenderness which He would show towards her; and anon leading her to some glad height of joy, or to some wondrous region of peace, for the very delight to Himself of beholding her happiness. But whatever be His leading, His purpose of love is worthy of Himself; and the faithful soul will adore Him in His infinite wisdom.

Understanding, therefore, that it is ever the desire of our Lord to disclose to us the treasures of His Sacred Heart, we shall await His leading at all times in the calmness of confident love, and with a certain gladness of expectation. We shall not hesitate to follow Him,

whether He call us to the depths or heights of interior knowing of His love. One of the most certain indications of His purposeful love is to be noted when He leads us to any of the deep ways of interior experience. There are deeps of humility, of self-aborrence, of spiritual suffering, of sorrow, from which "*the natural man*" shrinks. In our prayer we tremble before the inevitable descent into our own nothingness. And yet we always know that some secret perfection of love will be missed if we refuse to follow Him. And this will be followed by much after loss and failure; while, on His part, our Lord must sorrowfully turn from us as with renewed remembrances of the bitterness of His Passion.

This need not be, for if with expectant love we bravely respond to His leading, we shall experience His love and sympathy in new ways. It is something to know His love and desire towards us even when our hearts are not wholly free from the dominance of self-love; but when we have renounced this self-love, and have accepted the state of nothingness, howsoever we must enter it, it is a truly wonderful degree of love which He reveals towards us. It is as though He were saying: "My child, I have longed to show thee My love, but until now I could not, because thou wert not free in heart. The heart to which I can disclose the love of My Heart must be emptied and humble. Keep thus before Me, and thou shalt ever know the blessedness of My love."

We can descend to no depths beneath the reach of His love. When we touch the lowest step, we find He is still beneath us, His love supporting us. This is

the fruit of the Dereliction secured to us by the stupendous action of love within the Heart of Jesus on the Cross. There are secrets of love revealed in those depths wherein the will to suffer is the same as the will to love, which twofold action of the will is vital to the soul's perfect union with the Beloved. If the consummation of love appears as a high and glorious result of its ascending activity and aspiring devotion, let us not forget that in the spiritual life depth and height are equal. We must descend if we would ascend; we must traverse the valleys if we would scale the mountains. Yes, and in a true sense to descend is to ascend.

Who could tell of that which passes between the soul and the Beloved as He meets it in some deep experience wherein it is bereft of every earthly solace, and is alone, and without even the comfort it is wont to find within itself, when all succours of reason are exhausted, when, in the integrity of its love, it submits to Him alone? I believe that then the soul is confirmed in love through the unspeakable sense of His love. His Sacred Heart is open to the soul that is emptied of all save love. In the way of our spiritual advance we shall often need to make an act of interior renunciation, emptying the heart of selfish inclinations, before we can have any deep sense of Divine love. We should prepare in humility and renunciation before we contemplate the mysteries of love in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Our Lord Beloved can then exalt the beloved soul, calling it to heights of contemplation and of love. He can fill the prepared heart. The soul that is

willingly emptied of self reveals a capacity for love which He is prompt to recognize. "*He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*"¹ If He call the soul, as the Bride in the Canticle, from height to height,² it will always be to those which correspond to the depths of its humility. Humility being a virtue of great clearness, the love of the Sacred Heart, as a pure ray of Divine glory, is both perceived by the soul and also reflected in the depths of its own life. Hence the soul is humble even when it treads the mountain-tops.

The Beloved calls the humble soul to the heights, giving her at the same time the power to follow: "*He maketh my feet like hinds', and setteth me upon my high places.*"³ All our powers of ascent through love are from Him. We may stand unafraid on the heights when He bids us follow Him; but not otherwise. Perfect love will never presume, therefore in our desire for perfection in prayer we must never force our way. Our rest and peace in the prayer of love will always be gained through simply answering, love to love, as we abide with Him. Why should some be so eager to force their way beyond the simplicity of love in their desire for what is unusual and extraordinary? How they lose by their mistaken efforts! Having the Beloved, what more can we desire? Better were it to remain unvisited by any such thing than to lose one moment of simple communion in love with Him. Yea, the more we love Him the less we shall desire anything which may possibly hinder the desired union of our souls with Him. And this desire is not contrary

¹ Ps. cvii. 9.

² Chap. iv. 8.

³ Ps. xviii. 33.

to humility, because it is strongest when love is purest. Humble in the realization of its own nothingness, the soul yet burns with desire for the Beloved. Its humility is as essential to its love as the longing with which it seeks Him. And, moreover, in that humility consists the strength wherewith the soul obeys the Divine call to the mountain-tops of contemplation.

All that we have now understood of the revelation to the soul of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, both in the depths and in the heights, applies also to the revelation He gives in the darkness and in the light which alternate in the spiritual life. It is not all at once, or in the earlier experience of darkness, that we perceive and understand the revelation of love; but as we are instructed to meet all trials with courageous love, we learn to look for some fresh evidence in each, and we are not disappointed. But for this truth of love, becoming through every trial the more interior possession of the soul, we should not be prepared for the growing intensity which marks each experience of those who are called to enter the Dark Night. But that love does possess such favoured souls is clear from the examples of those whose history we know. And it is always love that will have nought but the Beloved. When after experience of darkness the light again floods the inner life, it is of greater clearness, because of the purity which the soul has gained under discipline. The revelation of love burning in the Sacred Heart of the Beloved attracts the soul to itself; or, rather, He Himself, beholding the prepared soul, draws it within the very love of

His Heart. We have already had occasion to speak of these hard interior trials; but as we advance in prayer we may often need to encourage ourselves to meet with steadfast love some mystic trial. If only we are faithful to the truth that is always a test of love, and respond with all our strength, we shall never miss the revelation of yet more glorious love in the Sacred Heart of our Lord.

This is the truth made clear to us at every turn of interior experience. Within the court of prayer there can be no stagnation of spirit, but expansion, illumination, vitalization. We live after the manner of spirits, foretasting the joy of heavenly activity. Hence, as we respond to spiritual forces which surround us, we are assisted in the employment of every faculty, and that with such great simplicity that we pass readily to the holiest intuitions, without at the moment perceiving the vastness of the blessing vouchsafed to us. Perhaps we may never on earth know how near is the hidden sanctuary of the soul to the Heaven of our hopes.

VIII

As we abide in the court of prayer, and as there is granted to us the realization of spiritual power acting upon us and through us, refining our perception of love, controlling our activities, and bringing all our thoughts and aspirations into harmony with the purpose of love within the Sacred Heart of the Beloved,

there are sometimes granted to us in prayer very intimate communications of His love. He seems to share with the soul He loves the very joy of His Heart; and even to call it to some appreciation of particular elements in that joy. But it would appear that He reserves this for those who already contribute in some way to His joy. His gladness of love overflows to them, and they perceive how the love and devotion of His creatures are treasured by Him, and how the evil of the world holds back the joy from His Heart. All that we may understand, all that in moments of holy intuition may flash in upon our spiritual sight, all that we can appreciate of spiritual realities, are to be found in some way ministering to the rapture of the Sacred Heart. We may know this for ourselves as we refer all to Him again as their Author, and praise Him in them.

The rapture of the Sacred Heart of the Incarnate Lord! Who could presume to declare it? It is beyond expression and declaration. In approaching the subject at all, we can be guided only by inferences, either from the revelations of His Own glorious life or from the restrained language of the Saints who have known most of His love. To them He has granted knowledge through intuition, intellectual visions and the like; and what they have known has produced in them a degree of love, and a desire for purity, wholly supernatural. They were moved to an interior correspondence to that which they perceived in them. They overflowed with spiritual joy because of all they received. But they were raised to this in prayer as they contemplated their Lord, the centre of all love,

receiving the worship and adoration of all intelligences. And it is in the same way of prayer that we shall gain the like knowledge, if He wills so to enlighten us. But only as we are profoundly humbled in love shall we prove this.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus we may contemplate a fulness of being. "*In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*"¹ Not only are there in God so many attributes which we may understand, and which He allows to be seen, but there are also others which are incommunicable, and, above all, "an indefinable and higher good that contains all other goods."² All, however, are to be contemplated and adored in the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and we cannot afford to ignore this indwelling fulness when we exalt Him in the homage of our love.

O souls who would contemplate the rapture of the Sacred Heart, and rejoice for all the joy of your Lord Beloved, how pure must be your love, how profound your self-abasement, how simple and direct your aspirations! Only the most loving may be admitted to this experience in the court of prayer. It presupposes some progress towards union, for there must be a very near approximation of the heart of the lover to that of the Beloved before He can communicate its rapture; for it is more than the unaided soul can receive. Yet we may devoutly and humbly meditate upon it, if by so doing we may ourselves more truly burn with love to Him.

Consider the abiding rapture of His Sacred

¹ Col. ii. 9.

² Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. xviii. 25.

Humanity taken into the Godhead. The Hypostatic Union implies an ecstasy of love which, save possibly for the moment of the Dereliction, was unbroken. His Sacred Heart burns with the Divine love within the Godhead. That mystery of love which within the Divine Trinity is the incommunicable joy of God, which no Angel or Saint can share, is the possession of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And it is of particular interest to us who are called in the way of prayer to the state of union with Him. He imparts to those who are found apt for the life of union some measure of His Own joy, according to the degree of union to which they attain by love. As a soul is even a little exalted in prayer, there is always an apprehension of love into which it is taken, a love not of this world, and wholly immeasurable. There are in it depths and heights which suggest the immensity of God; and yet we know it all as in our Lord Himself, the surpassing treasure of His Sacred Heart. What it must be both to Angels and Saints, whose capacity for so Divine a knowledge far surpasses our own, cannot be told. But what it is to them breaks forth from them again in their worship and praise of love, to add yet to the rapture of the Sacred Heart, through the manifold sympathies of the Incarnate Lord. And so we try to unite with them, and may, through our prayer, find a deeper joy, and be moved to profounder adoration.

If we consider the Holy Angels, the order of their life, and the regularity of their service, issuing in praise so harmonious that nothing discordant could be imagined, we are attracted from their praise to

the subject of it. Beginning at the highest, their praise is of the eternal majesty of the Blessed Trinity.¹ The Seraphim—ardent, loving spirits—praise God for what He *is*. Contemplating His love they adore, and their adoration is the expression of their love. This note of love goes out from them to all the Angelic Orders, to be the inspiration of every act of praise. If we think of them as desiring “*to look into*”² the mysteries of man’s redemption—through the Incarnation—we are also directed to their anthem of praise for the achievements of the Incarnate Lord.³ The angelic life is essentially a life of praise, because it is of love. The harmony of their praise is not mechanical, but essential, because it springs from the unity of love. But all love is of God.⁴ The Divine love is the source not only of all love, but also of all joy. There cannot be joy without love. The praise of the Angels is the utterance of their great joy in God. With all reverence we say that their praise is likewise a joy to God Himself, because it is love; so that the praise of the Angels is the perpetual song of love, celebrating the joy which they have in God, and which He has in them.

The joy of angelic love enters into the rapture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But as the human soul is purified, and taken into union with its Lord, He grants to it a share in His Own joy. We in our love would praise Him, offering the perfect homage and adoration of love. We can rejoice that He is thus praised, and worthily, by the Holy Angels. We can

¹ Is. vi. 3; Rev. iv. 8.

² 1 S. Peter i. 12.

³ Rev. v. 11-12.

⁴ 1 S. John iv. 7.

follow them in their pure worship, and as we aspire in love to the same note of praise, we may find somewhat of its sweetness in our own hearts. We may be far off from the perfection of those to whom it has been given to hear the very music of the Angels; but we have touched a source of heavenly joy in the Heart of the Beloved—the Heart which is ever the delight of the humble lover.

But in the rapture of the Sacred Heart there is also the note of exultation. The Saints exult in His victory. They praise Him in their love. And how wonderful is the love of the Saints! It is rich through the memories of all their trials and victories; all their prayers and communions; all their sorrows and joys; because through them all they learned the secret of His Heart's love towards themselves. And so they pour out their praises. Our Lady's "Magnificat" mingles with the triumph song of Martyrs and Confessors,¹ with the fervent aspiration of the Holy Souls and the devotion of the Church Militant.

And beneath all this, and running through it, there is the joy of that secret of love which constitutes the individual and personal bond between each Saint and the Beloved. It is joy which is His in them and theirs in Him. So in relation to the redeemed and their praises we think of the joyous Heart of Jesus. With all His Saints we rejoice in Him, and for very love we rejoice with Him in them. The court of prayer becomes the court of praise, as our hearts respond to the rapture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This rapture of the Sacred Heart is also a mighty

¹ Rev. vii. 9-14.

response of His love to the aspirations of faithful souls. All through His earthly life the virtues of His Saints and their perfection in love moved Him to perpetual aspiration. As Son of Man He aspired to the perfection of holiness for every one. So now our aspirations are to be continuous—the soaring of the soul towards the heights to which He aspired for us. If this be done in love we shall feel the inspiration, the exhilaration, of love from the Divine heights of sanctity; the pure air of Heaven will brace and invigorate us. We shall anticipate the joyousness of sanctity to which our Lord calls us.

But in all this it is His joy that overflows to us, His rapture which thrills us. And we contemplate Him as these streams of devotion flow into His Heart from Angels, and Saints, and faithful souls. We rejoice in Him and with Him, glad in our hearts for the fulness of the praise offered to Him, and yet finding our own part—which is the simple, personal offering—unworthy as we both know and feel, and yet accepted as we also know and feel, just because it is love; and, being love, it is joy to us in His Sacred Heart. And we rest thus in understanding love within His Heart, realizing, through the very joy which is His and ours, how the hidden sanctuary of His Heart and ours resounds to His praise. We begin to understand His outward looking in love for us when He said, “*Abide in Me, and I in you.*” In His Heart is the rapture of eternal, Divine love, which He waits only to impart to those whose hearts are prepared in love.

IX

There is deep peace within the court of prayer. It is so profound that we do not immediately appreciate it. It is peace which is God's Own, within which He dwells, and into which He receives the soul that is prepared for peace. The Divine peace is, to the soul experiencing it, both a gift and a state. We must possess it as a gift before we can fully appreciate it as a state. The truth of this is impressed through our experience in the court of prayer. There are occasions when we do not, because we cannot, respond to the peace : we enter into it, but it does not become the possession of our hearts. We are within an atmosphere too wonderful for us, we cannot breathe in it. There are two reasons for this, either of which may affect us : It may be that we are temporarily separated from God by some fault ; or we may be troubled by attacks of the enemy, who is ever seeking to rob us of peace. If we enter always upon our prayer with humility and penitence we shall overcome the first difficulty ; and if likewise we commit the keeping of our souls to the care of our Lord, determined not to offend Him in will, however we may suffer, we shall meet the second difficulty. We shall not be as strangers to the Divine peace, although we may not fully enjoy it. But within this court of prayer the Saints have again and again entered through their conflicts upon a way of profounder peace. That is to say, they have here found a depth of peace within the

Heart of the Beloved which is to them verily His gift of love : “ *My peace I give unto you.*”

Beside this all other conceptions of peace are poor and unsatisfying. It is one of many revelations to us of the rationale of Catholic sainthood. And while we appreciate more the mind of the Saint, we are ourselves moved to holier endurance of spiritual distress and interior conflict. A Divine truth is presented to us; we have intuitions of the secret of peace; and already by an act of will we make it our own. Possessing the secret, it is but a matter of faithful love to act upon the knowledge gained, and so to emulate the experience of the Saints. We perceive, to our great joy, that, while the enemy may disturb our peace, he cannot take it from us; while by violent attacks he may seek to hinder and discourage us, he cannot rob us of the fruit of our victory when, through the grace of God, we have won it. The peace of God, the peace of the Sacred Heart, lies outside his life, and is unaffected by his malice, because it is secured to us by Love's victory over him.

What, then, is the secret of peace? “His will is our peace.” The moment we are identified with the Divine will we are in peace. Antagonism ceases; we pass over from self-love to Divine love; from wanting our own way we pass to a simplicity of loving desire for God's way. Love as between the soul and the Beloved comes to its own in rapturous peace. As through prayer we approach this oneness of will with God, we forsake the thought of any harshness on His part, and realize the deception latent in the suggestions of spiritual enemies. There

is nothing hard in the will of God. The hardness we experience is in our own will. God cannot change His purpose of love, for His love is Himself. His will is His self-determination in love. If we seek first to be one with Him in the very purpose of love, we shall work, contend, and suffer in defence of that purpose. Beholding the glorious ideal of love, we shall desire to be more and more truly one with the will of God. We shall be led into peace. When, therefore, we suffer, it is not by contemplating our own distress, not by too anxious thought of the forces ranged against us, not by any pleading of weakness, that we preserve our peace; but by aspiring to the very fulfilment of the purpose of love. By every effort of the enemy our love is challenged. If as warriors of the Cross we rise in defence of it, we keep our peace while we keep our love. Unconquered love is one with the love of Jesus; and as through His sore conflict on the Cross He kept the peace, because He kept the love, so the peace of His Sacred Heart is the strength of the faithful soldier of love.

And we prove all this in the prayer wherein love meets love with divinest understanding. Within the sacred peace of the court of prayer the secret is almost articulated; but yet it is learned by a means more sure than words. The heart of the disciple overflows into the Heart of the Beloved, while His Heart shares its whole possession with that of the disciple. "*My peace I give unto you.*" In that hour of mutual possession what can anything be by comparison? We may feel the pain, be worn by the conflict, borne down by assault, and yet know the bond between us

and our Lord is not broken. We have the earnest of love's victory within ourselves, and a great hope sustains us. We hope as we love, and already it grows towards a wondrous realization and possession. All the peace which enfolds us as we pray breathes into the soul the promise which love contains for those who valiantly defend it.

So dear to our Lord is this testimony of valour that He is wont to visit the soul in which it is manifested with inexpressible proofs of His Own love, bestowing graces which, while not ending the actual trial, strengthen the whole interior life, repaying a thousandfold the sufferings endured. One such moment of Divine visitation would be well purchased by greater sufferings than any we may have known. The peace of God is more than a recompense for the soul's warfare. It is more than consolation or the calming effect of love which soothes the spirit; for the soul is raised through its correspondence to grace to a higher degree of love, and consequently of peace. The visitation of the Beloved is in great peace, for He brings to the soul the fruit of His Own victory of love.

This Divine peace is proper to the court of prayer. It is not only that here our Lord visits the valiant soul, but also it is here, in our prayer, that we conquer. As upon the Cross He won the victory of love within the sanctuary of His Sacred Heart, so we win our victories, which, because of the bond which unites us to Him, issue in an immediate fruition of peace. We may be conscious of the peace of His Heart, which is the peace of the court of prayer, while the

inner conflict of our own hearts prevents us from perfectly enjoying it; but the moment our victory is gained it becomes our possession. The blessing of the Beloved is a giving of His peace.

X

From all we have considered of the soul's experience within the court of prayer, it might appear that great satisfaction would be attained by one who faithfully responded in love. And to a certain extent that is true. No one can receive in prayer the communications of Divine love, mystic light, and revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, together with the peace with which all three are given, and not feel a measure of satisfaction. And the more truly we are detached from love of self in all these experiences, and given wholly in simplicity to the Beloved, loving Him for Himself alone, the more certain is the satisfaction, and the more real. I say only, the more real; we must not say as yet the satisfaction is complete and full. That is not possible to us in the present, save by anticipation. The joy of the soul is in proportion to its satisfaction. We know how great it can be, even within this court of prayer—so great that it seems at times too much for the soul to bear. What, then, must that be which is reserved for the next court? Above all, what is it compared with that which awaits the perfected soul beyond all mortal human hindrance? It cannot be compared; for

although the satisfaction granted in this life be the same in kind as that which the Saints enjoy, their satisfaction surpasses ours in degree, and that almost infinitely.

But there is a relative satisfaction which may be ours in this court. What is the satisfaction of love? Is it not the consummation of all that love implies, the fruition of its attainment, the perfect mutual possession of the lover and the Beloved? But if there be love, true, pure, aspiring, courageous love, there is a blessed anticipation of its consummation. Already the soul can say, "*My Beloved is mine, and I am His ;*" and that expresses a degree of satisfaction in Him, and even assumes a corresponding degree on the part of the Beloved Himself. There is no presumption here—it is the natural consequence of love.

But who that knows anything of this but knows also the pain of love in its waiting? Whatever satisfaction may be possible to us in this life, it will not be without pain, and that all the greater as our present joy in the Beloved is enhanced by the proofs of His love, and, as we may reverently say, His anticipation with us of the consummation. While we are suffering the pain of love He is regarding us with such love that, if we might feel its intensity, would immediately deprive us of natural life. We could not feel it and not die of excess of that love which it would call forth in us. But this should greatly encourage us in our own pain and longing. It is no imaginary bliss which excites our desire, only to mock us at last by its

vanity. We know within ourselves its transcendent power; we could not resist it without denial of our own spiritual life. We have assurance of that we wait for.

What that longing of soul may be in any case we know, or may know, either in ourselves or by meditating upon the utterances of those Saints who have spoken of it. The poignancy of it has seldom been more naïvely expressed than by S. Teresa in one of her poems, from which we quote but one stanza :—

“ Apart from Thee, my God, my one Desire
I long for, what is life disconsolate
Save lengthened agony of life prolonged?
Ne'er have I looked upon so sad a fate.
I grieve to see my soul's most mournful state,
Beset with ills so wholly consummate
That still I die because I do not die.”¹

The Saint writes as one who cannot hide either her longing or her pain, but must speak to ease the heart-strain of her desire. S. John of the Cross is hardly less explicit. All his works bear the impress of a soul enamoured of God and longing for that which only God could be to him in the eternal fulfilment of love. Few Saints are more self-hidden within their writings than is S. John of the Cross; but no one could so describe the soul's passion for God who had no experience of it within himself. A martyr in will, he stands forth among the Saints as a great confessor of love.

Among the Saints this pain of love was their normal experience as they advanced in the unitive way.

¹ “The Soul's Desire” (*Minor Works*, p. 6).

We are familiar with the testimony of S. Paul : “ *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour : yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better : nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*”¹ The deep longing, and the pain of love, were none the less insistent because of the completeness of his self-forsaking. Love sufficient for so sublime an act makes the pain of desire inherently certain.

We must be prepared, therefore, for a deep pain of love in proportion to the very greatness and pureness of our desire to be with Christ, Who is, and for ever will be, our satisfaction. But it is not a pain that incapacitates. They who feel it most are among the most faithful and persevering of God’s servants. If they might lose the pain, they would cease to love with prevailing power, and they would have no will to labour. It is not a pain that kills, but that the rather witnesses to life and power.² S. Paul recognized it in himself, and with him is every soul in whom is the true appreciation of love. They will to suffer every pain of love; they rejoice in it, knowing how to value it. They will allow no distinction between love and suffering, because in this experience the two are as one.

We may think of the priest entering the sanctuary of old with awe to fulfil his ministration—to trim the lamps, to offer the incense, or to set in order the shew-

¹ Phil. i. 21-24.

² Cf. 1 Cor. xii. 9.

bread. How wistfully he would look from lamp or altar to the veil which hid the Sacred Presence! Were there given some rays of Divine light from within the Holy of Holies? Did the veil completely hide the mystery of light? We may allow such questions as we contemplate the attitude of a devout priest whose soul responded to the symbolism and mystery of the Tabernacle. Standing by the altar of incense, he would be so near the veil, so near the Presence, that often the longing of devout love must have been almost overpowering. Could we suppose that such love would be unrequited? May we not rather be sure that by many a mystic token he would be encouraged, made strong in life and faith? Even so the faithful soul, as priest in the court of prayer, is awed by that which lies within and beyond—within, where God abides essentially in the soul; and beyond, that is, behind the veil of our mortality. So may we at times realize how thin, and yet how impenetrable, is the veil between us and that of which love and faith assure us. Contemplation of the mystery of the Divine union quickens love, while the touches of that union, from time to time vouchsafed, speak to the priest-soul of acceptance and the favour of love. They point to the perfect satisfaction, and equally they increase the pain of longing and waiting. There is something assured beyond the court of prayer.

But the very pain of waiting is helping forward the preparedness of the soul for the day of vision and of union. We do not imagine that the waiting, or the pain of deferred satisfaction, are in themselves pleasing

to our Lord Beloved; but the love which they attest is His delight. Love is purified through its own pain. That is the truth to be recognized at every stage of its growth. The more interior the pain the more beautiful does love become in the refinement of purity. The result of all our pain of longing and waiting will be found in interior purity, expansion of soul, liberty of spirit, and power to *bear* the glory and the joy of union.

O souls in the way of prayer, be glad in your pain of love, and do not think to lose the pain without loss of interior joy. Your pain is joy, because it is love which suffers, and love rejoices in its own activity. But all such experience must be hidden. Only to the Beloved may it be properly declared and shown; for it is a matter which affects His Sacred Heart, when the suffering of the beloved soul bears witness to a love He died to win.

Let the soul, as priest within the court of prayer, stand by the altar of incense, praying in the illuminating power of the Holy Ghost, all right relation to the order of nature being preserved. Let the soul in love respond to the Divine air of the sanctuary, and unite in spirit with the harmonies of Heaven which reach the inner sense. Let the fire of Divine love which consumed the sacrifice here liberate the odours of all the virtues, and make the incense of prayer ascend to God. Let there be contemplation of the very end and purpose of vocation to this spiritual priesthood, and steadfastness of love in waiting for

the consummation. Love is not perfect that is impatient; therefore let us patiently wait upon the Beloved, knowing that having Him we have all for time and eternity. "*Blessed are all they that wait for Him.*"¹

¹ Is. xxx. 18.

PART IV

THE THIRD COURT: THE COURT OF UNION

THE life and service within the court of prayer is progressive. Love increases as it finds expression in prayer. Through love the soul's powers are quickened and developed, until the soul in its action becomes all love. God, Who is Himself Love, awaits the time of this wholly active and abounding love; it is the correspondence of the soul in its spiritual part to His Own essential nature, which is love. The union of love between Himself and the beloved soul is possible, even to that degree which is the most perfect of all, the truth of which lies at the very heart of mystical theology. The spiritual marriage is the supreme goal of all the mystic unions, every one of which is in its degree an union of love. We may say the same "even of the entire spiritual life." This constitutes our joy, and it encourages us in the way of prayer. We have not to inquire anxiously as to our exact position in the unitive way; but rather to live in this present time, hour by hour, in and by the power of this unifying love. The highest degree is made possible through faithfulness to love in the very place where we are. If we have advanced in love through every experience within the court of prayer, we may already

have attained to some well-defined degree of union, even though we may not have recognized its distinguishing marks. But for the moment we are not concerned with that. Let us, however, observe that it is God's will we should attain to an intimate degree of union. Everything depends upon the earnestness of the soul in love. When our Lord gave His promise of the Holy Ghost, He said: "*At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.*"¹ So, then, we progress in the way of this intimate union under the guidance, and with the assistance, of the Holy Ghost.

To have truly realized our place and opportunity within the court of prayer is the all-important condition of advance towards any degree of mystic union. Only in prayer can we mark the glory and beauty of that way of love which is wholly in union with God. "Think very prayerfully of the principal step towards the perfection of the union between the creatures and the Creator. Who may speak of such things? We venture to look onward by the pilgrim path by which the soul is to be led to this transcendent and amazing blessedness. If we could conceive what is the joy of those who have come to unhindered union—if we could realize that, it would be too great for us to bear; or, if we realized it, I suppose that it would kill us with joy."²

All this is very important to us as we stand in spirit before the court of the Presence, the veil of which has been parted for us. We have thought of the

¹ S. John xiv. 20.

² Father G. S. Hollings, in unpublished Retreat Notes.

priest in the Holy Place looking wistfully towards the Holy of Holies, which yet he might not enter. We have also thought of the soul, as priest in the court of prayer, longing to pass the veil, in his case no material thing, but the veil of his imperfections, ignorance, weakness, and sinfulness. How may he enter where only the High Priest may venture, and that with the incense of merit and the blood of atonement? "*And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*" This signified, at the very moment of Christ's death, the opening of the way, the removal of the barrier, both material and spiritual, for all souls, who now, in their priestly character, as redeemed by His Blood, and made members of His Body, have the right of approach. But more than this; He has for us entered the court of the Presence, the Holy Place not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. He has entered as our Forerunner. That rending of the veil opened the way. But shall we dare yet proceed? Can we follow, seeing that only the High Priest might enter? Must we not hesitate, even though the veil has been rent? We follow, we enter the court of the Presence in virtue of our union with the High Priest Himself. If we are truly in union we are borne along with Him. The Holy of Holies is the court of Heaven, where He appears in the presence of God for us. Surrounding Him are the Hosts of the Saints, every one transformed to His likeness in love.

And so we contemplate them, and from our own relative position in the union of love look onward. What do we see but the glory of the Divine will

manifested in every Saint, yea, in every one who is definitely responding to the love of God; for each act of the will that we make in acceptance of, and in correspondence to, His will, is blessed in the way of closer union with Him. As we think of Blessed Mary taken into closer union as she uttered her word : "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word ;*"¹ and drawn by the love of God into a closer embrace as she rose to the necessities of eternal love, so we see what may be the fruit of our own response to the call to persevere in the way of union according to His will.

I

That the human soul can be united to God its Creator is a truth at once so profound and so glorious that many fail altogether to appreciate it. Their minds have not outgrown the range of merely natural perceptions. They have no sense of the supernatural. They may not wholly disbelieve it; but their judgment is unaided by experience. Nor is this true only of the professedly irreligious and openly worldly for whom the spiritual life has no attraction; it is more or less true of many whose religious profession, so far as it goes, is quite sincere. If for a moment the thought of it arrests them, they regard it as too beautiful or too wonderful for them, whereas it should be the clearest call to effort, and the very holiest of inspiring spiritual perceptions. Such failure of appre-

¹ S. Luke i. 38.

ciation is due possibly to imperfect understanding of quite simple facts of their own inner life, or to neglect of grace. They need not turn away from the thought. It is God-given for the very purpose of leading them to truer conceptions of life as they may themselves, if they will, live it. They are called to realize the beauty and fulness of the life of grace, as being the foundation for the life of union.

In the first place, we must know how God is present within the soul. This knowledge is necessary both to self-reverence and also to that attitude of loving worship which the creature, in his humility, should maintain in the presence of his Creator. "There are three ways," says S. John of the Cross, "in which God is present within the soul. The first is His presence in essence, not in holy souls only, but in wretched and sinful souls as well, and also in all created things; for it is by this presence that He gives life and being; and were it once withdrawn all things would return to nothing. This presence never fails within the soul. The second is His presence by grace, whereby He dwells in the soul, pleased and satisfied with it. This presence is not in all souls; for those who fall into mortal sin lose it, and no soul can know in a natural way whether it has it or not. The third is His presence by spiritual affection. God is wont to show His presence in many devout souls in divers ways—in refreshment, joy, and gladness." ¹

From this we see that we are chiefly concerned with that presence of God within us which depends upon our correspondence to His movement towards

¹ Spiritual Canticle, stanza xi. 2-3.

us. That is, we must be in a state of grace. The word implies favour; and so the soul in a state of grace is the object of the Divine favour. God by His Own free gift first renders the soul capable of receiving and responding to this favour wherewith He regards it; for "to say that God shows favour to the soul is to say that He renders it worthy and capable of His love."¹ It is an act of love on His part, and when God regards a soul in love He thereby imparts to it a certain nobility and beauty. He realizes somewhat of His eternal purpose in that one: that which moved Him in the creation of that soul. A state of grace is the state wherein this Divine favour is not suspended. It implies both the loving regard of the Creator and also the consequence of that regard, viz. an increasing fitness in the soul itself as the object of God's love. In a state of grace the soul in all its powers is both refined and strengthened, God working unremittingly towards the highest manifestation of His presence within her.

Let us at this point try to understand both our dignity and responsibility as the favoured of God. This is not assuming a state of privilege or superiority over any other soul. Rather with the deepest sense of our own nothingness, adore our Lord God, Whose choice of us is so unmerited, as it is by us unexplainable. He created us in His Own image and likeness. Our spiritual nature is akin to God. That nature can be so perfected that He can take it into loving union with Himself. This was the purpose of His love in giving us being. But the Divine likeness in every

¹ Spiritual Canticle, stanza xxxii. 5.

soul is marred, defaced. Original sin perpetuates that defacement. But for all that, the purpose of Divine love remains the same. Union with God is the goal of the spiritual life. It is the end to be kept in view, a work to be accomplished by God and the soul working together. He reveals the way and method. He provides the means. It is ours to work as He directs; not as slaves, but as children with whom the Father's desire is the holiest motive in all that we do. While in our prayer we receive manifest proofs of the loving regard and favour of God, let us contemplate His attitude towards us, as it were with consciousness of His purpose. We rejoice, indeed, in His favour, we are glad in the feeling of His love; but in contemplation of His attitude of favour we discern more than a passing expression of love. He is working by means of that very look of love. He is love, and by that act communicates life and power through love. His Divine purpose towards us is confirmed and developed. Let us endeavour to trace this working of love.

The restoration of the Divine likeness in the soul is the loving purpose of God in the bestowal of grace. If we could imagine a soul faithful to every movement of Divine love towards itself, we should mark its rapid progress in holiness, we should contemplate a Saint. In a Saint we may behold the restored likeness to God, begun in grace and perfected in love. Really, as we have seen, because grace is in its origin the favour of God, it is a gift of His love; but we assign to love a special place as the effective cause of the highest degree of union. Grace begins the

work, which is ultimately perfected by love in that which is known as transforming union. How careful we should be, therefore, both to understand, and persevere in, the life of grace, as being the very beginning and foundation of the desired union! And it is begun by God Himself. The whole of the truth concerning the bestowal of grace is proof of this. All the manifold gifts of grace confirm it to us. We cannot be too certainly assured of this loving purpose in the Divine working of grace. The effect is immediate, the fruit abundant, in the soul that approaches the means of grace with knowledge of the love that operates within them. We are by them renewed in spiritual power, the power to live unto God. We receive out of His abundance. "*Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*"¹

We are then united to God by grace. We live through Him the life which He desires to make ever more abundant, and which should glow more and more brightly with the pure radiance of the light of His favour. While in the Saints this supernatural glow of life is one feature of their imperishable beauty, it is to be observed in various stages of development in all who are rightly responding to grace. If it should please God to favour us with extraordinary graces in our prayer, they will, if humbly received, contribute to the perfecting of sanctifying grace, though in no way taking its place. Sanctifying grace is indispensable; extraordinary graces are not necessary to sanctification. Sanctifying grace is unifying in so far as it promotes and sustains the soul's

¹ S. John i. 16.

life in God. And because it unites us to God to that extent, or in that degree, we may even contemplate the glory which is revealed to us through the loving act, or favour, of God towards us. Openness and freedom are the characteristics of His acts of love towards us. He invites the attention of the soul, and allures it along the path of interior knowledge, and rewards it with a certain clearness of intuition and perceptions of hidden truth. He will strengthen us for all our spiritual work through the sure perception of Divine realities.

While we contemplate Divine realities there springs up within us a great hope; not merely a longing to possess them, but the great hope that they will one day become our own. And because hope is ours, that glad, energizing virtue, we aspire to the glory disclosed to us. And while hope is buoyant and strong, love receives its stimulus; for that which appeals to us out of the Heaven of our hope is love. Love calls to love. There is that which speaks to the heart with assurance above that of any temporal gratification. The soul will be satisfied not merely with the life revealed, but in Him Who is Life itself—the Eternal God. Love penetrates to the very throne of His Glory, and hope bears up the soul when the vicissitudes of life occasion only dulness and confusion. The soul united to God by grace has need of hope; for “hope enters into the innermost Sanctuary, the true Holy of Holies, that Presence of God where Christ is.” We have that hope “*as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner*

*is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."*¹

II

We need to remind ourselves that while, for the sake of orderly devotional thought, we distinguish between the several courts within the hidden sanctuary, there is no necessary line of separation. We pass from one to the other as the circumstances of the days suggest the particular form of devotion. There is, indeed, a movement always in the direction of union with God. As love increases through sacrifice and prayer, there is a readier recognition of the Divine favour. The indwelling of God by grace leads to holier desires for perfect union with Him, until the intention of prayer and sacrifice is directed to that end. But if we can say this of all progress in grace, and in particular through the Sacraments, it is most of all true of the effect in us of the Blessed Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood—the Sacrament of union. "*He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me and I in Him.*"² That is, communion of His Body and Blood makes possible that well-defined and ordered interior life which we are trying to understand within the term of the hidden sanctuary. Without that Sacrament the soul is without "life,"³ and in a state of separation from Christ.⁴ Our Lord makes it essential to the union He would perfect between the soul and Himself.

¹ Heb. vi. 19, 20; see also Westcott, *ad loc.* ² S. John vi. 56.

³ S. John vi. 53.

⁴ S. John xv. 5, 6.

It is therefore in the Catholic sense the necessary condition to mystical union. But though the experience of mystical union is not universal, that of sacramental union is intended for all souls without exception. We have therefore to aim at its perfection in ourselves.

The Offering by the Church of the Holy Sacrifice is a continual act in which every one of the faithful has a part, a share. The High Priest presents Himself as offered in Heaven. On earth the Church, His Mystical Body, in her priestly character, makes the same Offering; or, rather, He on earth, through His Mystical Body, makes the Offering. It is *His* action, whether in Heaven or on earth. We cannot claim to be in union with Him if we stand apart from that Offering. And whatever be our opportunities for immediate assistance at Mass, we are at least bound to unite with the Church in will. If this suggests to any one an unusual thought of personal responsibility towards the Blessed Sacrament, let it be prayerfully considered as the simple consequence of that mutual indwelling of the soul and Christ in which we profess our belief. It will be seen that our obligations are great in proportion to the reality of our union with Him. What He does is to be done likewise by the soul in union, as a living member of His Mystical Body.

If we make our Communion with only the desire for grace for present need, we limit our own prospect of blessing. The grace of communion is the highest we can seek on earth; but seeing that God dwells in souls by grace, how all-important to the life of

union is that greatest of all occasions of grace ! After communion we may consider our blessedness in His Gift. If the grace so given is not forfeited through sin, the union of our souls with Him is made more perfect. This is a very blessed truth, and would be realized with a joyful sense of spiritual prerogative if we received it always with adoring love ; for this union with our Lord, the Great High Priest, through the reception of His most Sacred Body and Blood, gives us a place, all our own, with Him in His prevailing intercession in the court of Heaven itself. The one offering on Calvary is pleaded by the presence of Jesus in Heaven and upon the altars of the Church at one and the same time, by one and the same act. The greatness and grandeur of the act, sustained as it is, and incapable of cessation until our Lord's return, must appeal to every heart in which His love is burning. And what a thought is here to move us to greater devotion when assisting at the Holy Sacrifice ! Our Lord Beloved, by His presence in Heaven, and upon the Altars of the Church, sustains His Offering ; and we, as members of His Body, are with Him in that act, but in very deed the act is our own, by reason of our union with Him. And as He, in the might and glory of His love, holds in eternal sureness the efficacy of His Sacrifice, and awaits the time of the end, so He would have us strong in Love's certainty as we unite with Him "*until He come.*"

If through prayer the beloved soul apprehends the glory of the spiritual kingdom, and realizes its proper service as priest within the hidden sanctuary, in the proper understanding of its place in relation to the

tremendous offering of the Mass, as really one with our Lord's pleading in Heaven, there follows the most certain conviction of the true inwardness of our Christian calling. We are not merely given time in which to live more or less devoutly, and with regard only to our personal salvation. We are called to a larger and grander life, to be realized in union with our Lord in His work. It is purely a spiritual service, and not always to be identified with schemes of social and religious advance; but given the Perpetual Offering, it may be otherwise a hidden service. It is a mighty work of love, in which each should claim his share. It is of love because it is the whole concern of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His Sacrifice, His Intercession, are for the whole world. He bears upon His Heart, as High Priest, the whole need and burden of the race; but in the greatness of His love He shares the glory of His Priesthood with the faithful of His Church. And we are not worthy of the dignity if we do not aspire to His Divine intention.

Let us from time to time, as the vast needs of mankind are revealed by portentous events, contemplate the Heart of the Beloved, to Whom every necessity is an appeal to love, and every event a hastening of the end. What will He? If we are really His lovers, do we not perceive in the very priestliness of our calling the most glorious opportunity? He is saving the world by love—love attested by the Sacrifice made on Calvary, and still mystically offered. One with Him through communion of His Body and Blood, that is, of the very Life that was offered, we can be one with Him in

love, in will, in suffering and in service, giving all, as He did, for the salvation of the world. But this is an interior work of the faithful soul. The court of union is the place of pleading. Alone with the Beloved, conscious of the grace of communion which exalts us in Him, we aspire to the perfect work of love. Love, strong, penetrating and discerning, will bear all that can be known of the burden of the Sacred Heart; it will plead effectually the Holy Sacrifice; it will win for the world the fulfilment of the very desire which filled the soul of Jesus on the Cross, and still lives in His prevailing intercession.

Can we do more? Can we not look with Him to the end? As love moves us we shall not be faint-hearted. Where there is pessimism there the confidence of love is wanting. No one can be united to our Lord sacramentally, and know the love of His Sacred Heart, and at the same time be hopeless in the presence of the world's agony. The very suffering of love which must be ours if we are one with our Lord is proof, if we need any, that love, His in ours, and ours in His, cannot fail. Once again, the court of union is the court of pleading, and the pleading of eternal love is its endurance unto victory. Hidden within the beloved soul is a power which all should exert. It is the power of love consecrated to the highest ends. We know them only as we know the Heart of Jesus. To know them, and to attain to them, is the portion of the faithful lover. To be with Jesus in the triumph of priestly love is the portion of the Saint.

III

It will be well to consider here a degree of love with which they become familiar who, through all their service within the hidden sanctuary, grow in knowledge of the Beloved. The abundance of grace which flows into their souls serves to increase their love. The holier the soul becomes through sanctifying grace, the more simply will it respond to the love of God. He will be loved more for Himself as the soul, assisted by grace, perceives His Divine beauty. They are advancing souls who sing of the graces of the Beloved. When by His Own love for a soul He makes it more comely and adorns it with graces, it is enabled to contemplate His perfections, and to celebrate them, as we learn from the Canticle, where, after being praised by her Beloved, the Bride seeks to express herself in praise of Him. She sees only Him, and is concerned about nothing save her love for Him. But what love is it? It is not to be expressed by any words, though she has recourse to comparisons which describe Him in His relation to herself. She declares much, but leaves far more unsaid. Her words impress us with the futility of all earthly expression. It is love which is *felt*. Gladly would the soul find utterance, but it can never do so. And also it finds no way of expressing its love by works. It longs to show and prove its love, but outward works tend rather to distractions. They detract from that inward attention to the Beloved to which it is impelled. The soul would declare its love

to Him, would be itself all love, be wholly self-given in love. Its one wish is to satisfy His desire for love; for loving Him thus, the soul perceives in Him a corresponding desire. He seeks to be loved.

Who may declare the secret of that which we may reverently call the *necessity* of love in the Sacred Heart of Jesus? We must love Him with constancy before He will reveal it to us. It is one thing to be assured of this by some spiritual teacher; it is another and a higher thing to know it within ourselves. We understand it only as we love; for love, going out to its Object, unites the lover to the Beloved in such a manner that all possessions and interests are held in common. So our Lord quickens within us by His love the deep sense of the necessity of love, not indeed unto the perfection of His Own knowledge, but in proportion to the degree of our love for Him. When a soul attains to mystic union, there is usually a heightened sense of this necessity of love in the Heart of the Beloved. Hence there is to be observed in the Saints a passionate desire to repay the debt of love to Him. And the Beloved responds by communicating to them, as they are able to bear them, the sentiments of His Own Heart. This is one of His greatest proofs of love.

But while we aspire to such a degree of intimate love, let us notice two ways by which our Lord impresses this necessity upon the hearts of those who love Him. There is a longing for the love of those for whom He died, which can never be satisfied until all the fruits of His Passion are gathered. The burden of His fifth word from the Cross rests still

upon His Sacred Heart. His thirst declares the burning necessity of love. The awfulness of unresponsiveness appears as we contemplate that necessity; it is a Divine necessity declared through human sensibility. If we have grace to perceive it, let us give immediately the whole love of our hearts; for it is of His love to us that He has revealed it. Indeed He reveals it in order that we may meet the Divine necessity with the *gift of love*; not with the service of love merely, but with the gift of love as we feel it in its own essential relation to that necessity.

There is yet another expression of His love revealing this necessity. Amidst the unlove, and worse than unlove, of the world He seeks those whose hearts are prepared in love, that He may find rest with them. In His Own tender way He shows His love by dwelling within the heart that realizes the necessity of His Own Sacred Heart. They who most of all *feel* the love, who are so inflamed with it that they may be described as all love, offer Him, as it were, a desired refuge from the unlove of those who banish Him from their hearts. They who are thus blessed will not boast of their distinction, for they are the humblest of souls, not knowing the greatness of their own love for the sorrow they feel on account of their poverty of love in view of the glory of Divine love in Him. But, hidden within the great concourse of souls, they live and love, and to them their Lord makes known the secrets of His Heart while He abides with them and in them. Thus He exalts them to an experience in which they share His conception of love, making their offering acceptable. It is true

they have only love to offer; but it is love directed towards a Divine accomplishment. It is a blessed thing in itself, and it becomes the foundation for mystic union. We will not claim for it more than this. It may be experienced in the mystic state without being in itself a mystic grace, except in the sense that such love for God is in itself mystical.

We have not advanced very far in the knowledge of the love of Jesus if we have no conception of the necessity which, as a living thirst, is still the strong impulsion of the love which appeals to us. But who can regard the conditions of human life as they are, and not appreciate the magnitude of the world's debt of love? Who that has any feeling of it but must desire to make some act of reparation? The first work of reparation consists in the consistent wholeness of our personal offering of love. So-called "acts of reparation" can be of little real value except as they express the love which is the first and last necessity. This is reparation which all should offer; but it is the privilege, above all, of those who in any degree have knowledge of the Heart of Jesus.

IV

Very blessed is that union of the soul with God which is affected by grace. It is the foundation of eternal blessedness. It is that to which the whole energy of the Church is directed through her sublime ministries. The sanctification of her children is the

dominating thought of her life, for the solicitude of the Church is that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Do we feel the active love of our spiritual mother? It is the love of Christ shed abroad through the organism of His Mystical Body. His love burns and glows with increasing power as souls are sanctified, that is, as they attain to more perfect union with Him. Every Saint enriches the life of the Church, and makes her consciousness of power through the Divine love a source of holy confidence to the faithful. Thus their prayers avail for us. How glorious is the love of our Lady, how exalted the love of the holy Apostles, of the army of Martyrs, of the hosts of Confessors, of the choirs of Virgins! The glory of their love and the power of their prayers are perceived according to the degree of their union with their Lord. What wonder is it, therefore, that they never cease to magnify the grace of union? And if their writings survive as undying testimony to the unifying love of God, no less clear is the witness of those who, still in the flesh, have experience of it. They live in the light and power of it. To them it is the great reality, contrasting at all times with the ever-changing phases of earthly existence. It is life as they know it within the hidden sanctuary.

This, which is the experience of souls united to God by grace, is yet more intensely felt by those who have experience of the higher union by love or mystical union. They burn at times more interiorly with Divine love; its ardours are then more pronounced. In this state "the soul has an eminently delicious perception that God is united to her, and

rendering her a participation in His life; thus causing transformation in the deepest region of the soul, so that the soul has received for her own proper life the Divine Life. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' It is a sort of substitution without individuality being destroyed. The soul passes into God, and God into the soul—a marvellous communion."¹ But the way of God with the soul He wills to lead into the state of transforming union is most simple in loving tenderness and regard for its weakness. It begins with some almost imperceptible "touch," to use a mystical expression. These "touches" vary in intensity, generally increasing both in frequency and effect. It may be felt in the consciousness of the Divine presence and indwelling; it may be perceived as an embrace or clasp of love, within which the soul is held for a shorter or longer period. And this description of it as an "embrace" or "clasp" is very commonly given. Space does not admit of quotations at any length; but the following from Blossius is typical of many. Some there are "who are inundated in their inmost souls with plenteous sweetness from God, are joined to Him by internal *embrace* of love in sensible union, and receive from Him most sweet spiritual *embraces* of love."² It is generally recognized that they who are so favoured of God are destined by Him for the highest degree of union, if they but continue faithful

¹ Father G. S. Hollings, unpublished notes.

² *A Book of Spiritual Instruction*, App. I. chap. i. No. 2. (For other most interesting extracts see Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. vi.)

to Him. Every such experience is of peculiar importance to the soul; and even though it be not repeated for a considerable time, it loses nothing of its original force as a token of Divine love. In His Own time God will return with yet greater gifts in continuance of the work He has begun.

Very much has been written about the degrees of Mystical Union; and, stated quite simply, they may be given thus: "It has three degrees—(1) Simple Union; (2) Spiritual Betrothal; (3) Spiritual Marriage. These degrees differ one from another in their perfection, and in the greater or less degree of intimacy with God."¹ It may be simple union, when it is intimate, but fleeting, without attracting the soul from the sphere of the things of the senses; or ecstatic, when it has intensity, and suspends all other perceptions; or the spiritual marriage, that is the highest union possible on earth, and which is permanent, indissoluble.

These are set before us as possible of attainment within the hidden sanctuary. But every degree of union presupposes the establishment of the soul in that which precedes it. These higher degrees are not within our own power. We can but dispose ourselves in love, mortifying ourselves and putting away all impediments as far as possible, abandoning the things of the world, and watching against cares, riches and pleasures of this life. When God finds a soul prepared, He will not fail to bestow those higher graces. But who can ever think themselves worthy of such love? The contemplation of it should lead

¹ Father G. S. Hollings, unpublished notes.

us to the most humble estimation of our own state, even while it inspires us to holier interior efforts. If we have experienced any touch of this union, even of the lowest degree, we ought to persevere in love, seeking only to become more interiorly pure; for in due time some further grace will be given to us. It is true that we may have to endure the discipline of waiting; but let us profit by it. If we lovingly apply ourselves to the hidden work of interior correspondence to all the conditions of the court of union, our days will be well filled; and though at times the soul's longing for the Beloved may increase to almost intolerable pain, we shall know that even so we are being conformed to His likeness. He is the Author of that very longing and desire. And although we do not always realize it as a distinctive grace, it is indeed an aid to the development of love.¹ And when the moment we have waited for, which He desires even more ardently than the soul itself, shall come, the grace of union, however fleeting the experience of it, will more than repay the pain of our anticipation.

The high experiences of souls in the court of union are in very deed preparatory to that which awaits them hereafter. In most intimate ways they are prepared for the Beatific vision. In the ordered degrees of union there is a steady advance in the knowledge and understanding of Divine things. Many things are recorded which the soul perceives with great clearness of spiritual vision, but which cannot be told, for all language falls short of that

¹ Cf. *Imitation*, Book III. chap. xlix.

wondrous communication of God to souls in a state of union. At the highest degree there "is granted a revelation of the Blessed Trinity; then union with the Eternal Lord; then the dwelling of the Blessed Trinity within the soul."¹ All this is very wonderful, but it is only an intensifying of what is already ours if we are in a state of grace. Our Lord says: "*If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.*"² There is the promise, and God is faithful.

There is at this degree a certain confirmation of the soul in grace. Where Saints have differed in opinion, where one has been less positive than another, it would ill become the present writer to say more than that the soul is made very strong in grace, and apparently very secure. "Whatever opinion," writes Fr. Poulain, "may be adopted, this, at least, is the case, that it *seems* to the soul that she can no longer sin, so fully does she feel herself to be participating in the life of God. This does not prevent her seeing very clearly at the same time that of herself she is capable of all kinds of sin. She sees the abyss into which she may fall, and the powerful Hand that sustains her."³ We must recognize at this stage of spiritual perfection such pureness and strength of love that ordinary temptations to sin would fail. Love would be so true in its direction as to make

¹ Father G. S. Hollings. Cf. also Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. xix.

² S. John xiv. 23.

³ *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. xix. 25.

temptation only the occasion for its own strongest action. Such determination within the soul is not unknown to us at any stage of our progress; but its strength is manifested more and more as the soul advances. Therefore the soul becomes strong in love, and well-nigh invincible.

And yet within the life so ordered and so strong what is there but love? But it is love that has passed the bounds of common understanding. Who has ever really understood a Saint? The more perfect the soul in love the less there remains of earthliness. There is an approximation to heavenly standards. Love in God is infinitely above and beyond the highest standards perceived by men. In the Saints there is often to be observed an utter disregard of human and earthly standards and conceptions. They look out upon a larger life and wider fields of spiritual activity, where love, as men commonly regard it, is wholly inadequate and insufficient. They behold, they live, they aspire, in the strength of love which is theirs in virtue of their closer union with God. They apprehend all things as they really are in God. They love with His love, as they live by His life. They dwell in God and God in them.

V

To be in union with God is to have also fellowship with the Saints. The more perfect the union the closer the fellowship. In the histories of the Saints themselves we find evidence of this. As they attained

to higher degrees of union, so were they often encouraged by those who had lived in earlier ages. They had converse with them, or specific proofs of their sympathy. But it is not with supernatural visitations that we need concern ourselves. They are but indications of a truth of greater importance than the credibility of visions. We do not doubt the visions; but we seek the truth without which they would be of little value.

In every Saint we mark a perfection of love, wherein they stand in individual relation to God. Pre-eminent in the holy Mother of God, it is also the resplendent personal glory of every Saint. A numberless multitude, individually united to God in love, they comprise a vast union of love. One love burns in them all, one desire, one purpose of abounding life. There is no thought or movement that is not in perfect harmony with the Divine love. Everything finds perfect expression in oneness with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Into this perfection of love in the Saints there flows the perfect love of the Angels. There is no discord, for love is one, whether in angelic or human spirits. All love is of God. And so we contemplate a state of love wherein all perfect spirits are united in the boundless love of God.

The charity of the Saints is that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Every soul in union with Him, whether by grace or by love, is an object of very loving regard. But when the soul attains to the union of love—the mystic union—there appears to be a more simple approach and intercourse on the part of the Saints; or in the purity of its love the

soul on earth moves more simply towards them. The soul in the way of perfection is assisted by their love. They pray for us. They prevail in prayer through the purity of their love. They are incapable of a thought which is not directed to God. They can desire nothing apart from Him. And, being united to Him in love, their prayer is effectual to the degree of their love.

As the soul itself is enriched with the grace of union, all that is proper to the Saints is contemplated with increasing sympathy. There is a close affinity between it and the Saints, and that in proportion to the degree of its love. The eternal inheritance of love is manifested to the persevering soul; but it is an "*inheritance among all them which are sanctified*;"¹ with them who have passed through the same hard conditions as our own; with them who even now love us, who witness with solicitude our conflicts, who pray for us, and procure for us the graces we need. All this becomes to the soul in union with God a marvellous realization of life within which it stands; for this is no partial truth, but the great reality. It is the tremendous reality to be apprehended of all through the Catholic faith.

As the beauty of it all unfolds to us, as the joy of it fills us, as the strength of it upholds us, what can have power to hold us back from our inheritance? If this is ours through union with God in love, we can make the Apostle's words our own, and exult with him in the Divine love. "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or*

¹ Acts xx. 32.

*persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*¹

But we find all this within the hidden sanctuary when, withdrawn from outward things, we may contemplate unhindered that great reality of life which is spread out before us. We hold the vision within the consciousness of Divine love. And ever as the grace of union enriches our souls we may “*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*”² The whole vision is of glory; for it is of God in the revelation of His love. But while we are impressed with the transcendence of the vision, we behold within it the very perfection of all that we perceive inwardly within ourselves. There is yet an immanence of God, eternal beauty and heavenly joy, which is sufficient for the present. We know the vision is but the extension of all that is ours in the Divine union of love.

VI

Life within the hidden sanctuary is fulfilled in the union of the disciple with his Lord, the lover with

¹ Rom. viii. 35-39.

² 1 S. Peter i. 8.

the Beloved. The offering of sacrifice, and prayer, and praise, and every ministry of the soul in its priestly character, from being anticipations of union, become in the Divine union wondrously prevailing acts. They have a value in the corporate life of the Church not easily estimated. The soul in the state of union is very strong, for it shares in the life and graces of the Beloved. But that which is from one point of view perceived as strength, is from another to be contemplated as a certain grandeur of spiritual excellence, which is the result of the Divine endowment. The soul is not wholly aware of this,¹ for the glory of the transformation is for Heaven rather than earth; but knowing within itself that God hath done great things for it, it presents itself so adorned to worship with increased devotion. It has all along desired this degree of loving devotion; and has even anticipated it in some wonderful moments of its history. There was an understanding of love through sacrifice when the Divine mystery of the Cross drew us to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and our hearts were enkindled by its flame. There were days of illumination when the Holy Spirit quickened our powers, and taught us to contemplate and to know our Lord Beloved, when we knew that we were His and that He was ours. In such seasons we were often more blessed than we knew. There were touches of union preparing us for the blessing held in store for us. Now we can pursue the way of the Saints with gladness in His love.

But through all we have learned of the hidden

¹ Cf. Ex. xxxiv. 29.

sanctuary there is a single thought, a simple secret of perseverance and attainment : it is love—worshipful love in the soul—that gives itself to the service of the Beloved. We see in Him all that is lovable, noble, magnificent, gracious. The nobility and grace which first won our love are not obscured by His suffering or poverty, or even by the shame of the Cross. He is never more winning to the understanding heart than when His love appeals through His trials, or when the glory of His victories glows through the gloom of His Passion. And it is not that He awakens in us pity at the sight of His suffering and humiliation; rather, He reveals a greatness which no pain or sorrow can mar. It has been said of S. Clare : “ In the eyes of Clare, Jesus Christ in His poverty was the mirror of knightliness. It was not merely because He was poor on earth that she worshipped Him, but because His poverty was resplendent with that special perfection in which the chivalrous soul delighted.”¹ A mirror of knightliness, of all that is noble and gracious, of all that is strong and beautiful in spirit, is our Lord to His worshipful lover. The thought is that of the Bride : “ *My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand . . . this is my Beloved, this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*”²

If our Lord Beloved is all this to us, then our love also will be a worshipful love. But it is love that grows in depth and fulness through experience. How do we know our Lord in this pure idealism of love ?

¹ Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., *The Romanticism of S. Francis*.

² Cant. v, 16.

Simply because He reveals the ideal, and exalts it, in the actual experience of our days. If in Him we see the perfect example and expression of love; if in Him we behold every virtue resplendent; if He embodies for us every perfection and beauty of life; it is not as a fair vision merely that He attracts us. We know Him in all His perfections, and worship Him in love in every one of them, because He has met us in our own ways of life, and has suffered with us, loved with us, endured with us, aspired with us, conquered with us; yea, because He has done all these *in* us. He has shown us in Himself what is the highest and best, and when we have aspired to the victory of love He has taken us to His Heart, and we have loved Him. He has been to us the very meaning and fulness of life. He has become to us "chiefest."

Our homage of love has never been refused. We may have brought other offerings, and, like Cain, have felt they were rejected. But love has never been refused. It has become, through all spiritual occupations within the court of the hidden sanctuary, the secret of gladness, because the secret of acceptance. It has been through all love, personal, refining, and unifying. "*My Beloved is mine and I am His.*"¹

The Tabernacle of old had its place; it served its purpose in the spiritual training of God's people; it passed away. The hidden sanctuary of the soul has also that temporal characteristic. It is the representation of a state which is for time only, though

¹ Cant. ii. 16.

of time in relation to eternity. The days of discipline and sacrifice, the days of symbols and sacraments, the days of prayer and progress through painfulness, will end. But that to which all have tended, that which God has wrought in us through them—the perfection of love within us, and the glorious fact of union with Him—will not end. These are the fruits of time which survive for eternity. These are fruits and treasures ¹ laid up not merely for the soul's own enrichment in glory, but rather for the Beloved Himself. We could not then rejoice in anything that was not first of all accepted by Him. The pattern of the Tabernacle was shown from Heaven, that its uses for eternity might be understood. If we have been right in our application of its truth, mystically shown forth, may we not humbly aspire to a share in the Divine purpose if we are found in the union of love?

May He Who has revealed to us the treasures of His Sacred Heart confirm our souls in undying love to Himself.

¹ Cant. vii. 13; S. Matt. vi. 19-21.



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